Both Your Houses

Philip Gibbs

Hutchinson

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BEHIND THE CURTAIN

BOTH YOUR HOUSES

A NOVEL

by

PHILIP GIBBS

“A plague o’ both your houses.”
Mercatio in *Romeo and Juliet*

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Both Your Houses

CHAPTER I

A SQUARE-BUILT, square-faced man of about fifty years of age—possibly fifty-five—stood for a few minutes looking down at the old Thames by Westminster. He took off his black felt hat and let a light breeze touch his silver-grey hair which needed cutting. He thought of that. 'I must get a hair cut,' he thought. There never seemed time now for things like that. It was a hard life, this political game. Not much home life. Not enough time for sleep—not eight hours which he regarded as his minimum. His wife—'Mother' as he called her—had startled him the other day, though he laughed at her, by a remark over the breakfast table.

"I wish we was back in the old days," she said, "when you was foreman in the engineering shops at Rugby. We had a home then and you wasn't a stranger to your own wife. It's your ambition which has spoilt everything."

Ambition? Yes, he supposed she was right in a way. He had always been ambitious. He liked leadership, the sense of mastery over men and affairs, the satisfaction of feeling that his words and his ideas had an influence over other men's minds and made them act in the way he wanted—sometimes!

He had first tasted all that as a Trade Union leader, in Rugby. He had discovered the power of words, 'the gift of the gab' as some of his old pals called it. But there had been honesty behind it. He had never spoken insincerely. He had never been a liar, though now he knew that some of his early ideas and speeches had been very crude and violent. He had lost a lot of prejudices, perhaps too much of his old fire and passion. The House of Commons had tamed him down, and made him see the enormous difficulties of any Government. It was not so simple as he had thought, not so easy. England now was up against it. In only a few months—if American aid were not forthcoming—all our reserves would be gone. What then? Real hunger,

perhaps, something like national bankruptcy. Inflation uncontrolled. Blue ruin for everybody!

And the international situation was deteriorating, to say the least of it. Oh well... Somehow old England would struggle through. He was certain of that.

This square-built, square-faced man became conscious of the scene about him, a familiar and beautiful scene on this day when there was a touch of spring, a faint far-off promise of spring, in the air. There was a glint of sunshine on the old river. Big Ben and the Houses of Parliament rose into a sky blue between the scudding white clouds.

On the Surrey side the brown roof of the County Hall looked old and mellow like a Dutch picture. On this side the Abbey was a symbol of English history, a shrine of all its ghosts from the beginning. He had read a bit of history. He had a sense of it in his bones and blood, and now he was helping to shape it as a Member of Parliament and one of the big noises in the T.U.C. Ambition? Not for pure selfishness, he hoped, nor for personal vainglory. He wanted to serve England in a time of enormous crisis when some of his political friends were getting frightened. Some of the Labour Ministers were frightened men.

He glanced up at Big Ben again. Ten minutes to three. Time to take his place for the debate on Foreign Affairs.

A young man spoke to him, a shabby young man in a dirty old raincoat, who leaned over the Embankment by his side.

“The Talking Shop!” he said. “Makes one sick.”

The elderly man glanced at him and smiled beneath his spiky eyebrows.

“Feel like that about it?”

“How long is this Labour Government going to play the fool?” asked the young man who, in spite of his shabbiness, spoke in a cultured way, ‘the Oxford accent’ with every ‘h’ in its right place.

“Doing its best,” said the elderly man.

“Making a shocking mess,” said the shabby young man. “Refusing to face realities. Taking away all our old liberties, on the way to totalitarianism on the Russian pattern.”

“Nothing like that,” answered the elderly man. “You’ve got it a bit wrong, young fellow. Think again.”

The young man breathed hard for a moment and there was a flash of anger

in his eyes.

"I've thought a hell of a lot for the past six years, like others of my age and crowd who were fighting to save England. We expected something better than this grim kind of pantomime. 'Work or Want'—work *and* want is more like it. There was one of those Labour swine on the wireless last night—talking about Pride of Work—Stephen Inchbold—'Our Steenie' as they call him—Chairman, or something, of the T.U.C. I wanted to strangle him."

He stared fiercely at the elderly man and then a look of astonishment came into his eyes and he gave an uneasy laugh and spoke with a kind of stutter.

"Good lord!... Those eyebrows!... Low's cartoons... You're—you're——"

"Yes," said the elderly man with a grim kind of smile. "Good afternoon."

He walked to the gate of the Palace of Westminster where a policeman saluted him smartly. Outside the gate a small group of men raised a spluttering cheer and one of them called out "Good old Steenie!"

Ambition? Those words nagged in the mind of Stephen Inchbold as he walked towards the entrance of the House. Well, he liked to get a cheer now and then. He enjoyed a fighting debate. And it was pretty marvellous that a boy who had been to an elementary school in Rugby, going hungry sometimes when his father was out of work, should now be helping to decide the fate of England. One day he might be in the Government. He wouldn't shirk it though he knew the burden and the toil and the vast responsibility.

An aristocratic old man whom he knew by sight crossed his path and said, "Good afternoon, Inchbold," very civilly. "I liked your broadcast talk last night."

It was Lord Bramley, once Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, and for forty years, off and on, holding high office in Tory administrations.

"Thanks, my lord," answered Stephen Inchbold. He had to make an effort even now to address a Peer on equal terms.

"It ought to be an interesting debate this evening," said Lord Bramley. "Thank God we have a Foreign Secretary who stands up for England in no uncertain way—at least as far as Russia is concerned."

Inchbold nodded and then smiled slightly.

"A boy of the bulldog breed. But it's all very dangerous—I mean our relations, or lack of relations, with Russia."

"I agree."

Lord Bramley gave a little groan. Inchbold noticed that the old man was not wearing an overcoat though there was a little bite in the wind despite the whisper of spring. His clothes hung loosely on his thin old body and his white shirt was frayed at the cuffs. But there was something elegant and aristocratic about him.

"I must be getting on," said Inchbold. "Good afternoon, my lord."

"Just a moment, Inchbold," said this tall old man. "There was something I wanted to ask you."

"Yes?"

"Have you a young relative on the Allied Control in Berlin?"

Inchbold was startled. Why should this old man ask him about Julian, that boy of his who never wrote unless he wanted some more money or a consignment of cigarettes which he seemed to use for barter purposes in Germany?

"Yes," he answered, "my boy Julian."

"Oh, really!" said Lord Bramley. "Well, good afternoon. I mustn't keep you."

He raised an ebony stick and passed on towards the entrance to the Lords.

It was very odd that when Inchbold was in the lavatory of the House of Commons a young Conservative member, Christopher Harington—rather a live wire and making a name for himself on the back benches—should ask the same question.

"By the way, sir," he said after a moment's comment on the debate, "do you happen to have a relative on the Allied Control in Berlin?"

"Yes," said Inchbold. "My boy Julian. Why do you ask?"

Young Harington shrugged his shoulders slightly.

"Somebody mentioned him in a letter. I just wondered."

For a second or two Stephen Inchbold felt uneasy. He hoped his boy Julian had not got into any trouble. Lord Bramley, Christopher Harington. Why were they asking about him? Julian had never been very reliable. Even as a schoolboy he had been very troublesome. There was that affair of pinching another boy's pocket money. It was never quite proved against him, but was most painful to his father and mother. But he had done well in the war. How very odd that Bramley and Harington should enquire about him!

Inchbold went to his place on the Labour side of the House, and forgot this domestic question. There was a full house for the debate on Foreign Affairs.

CHAPTER II

It was not really very odd that Lord Bramley and Christopher Harington should enquire whether Inchbold had a relative on the Allied Control Commission in Germany. It had a perfectly simple explanation though a very painful one—most alarming, abominable, and heart-breaking in the mind of Harington.

He was very much in love with Pamela Faraday, daughter of Lord Bramley. He had wanted to marry her as soon after the War as possible when he became demobilized. The old man Bramley was quite agreeable to it.

“Shouldn’t want a better husband for Pam, my dear fellow,” he said one night in his smoking-room at Longacre, his country house in Sussex. “She’ll give you hell, having a high spirit and quick temper, but that’s your look-out.”

Lady Bramley had been equally complaisant.

“I should like Pamela to settle down after her disorderly life in the Wrens, and present me in due course with at least four grandchildren. I was afraid she might marry a Communist or some disreputable fellow without any morals. She has met the queerest people.”

But Pamela had not wanted to settle down. Far from it. She had accepted the offer of this job in Berlin—nothing more than that of a typist-secretary—and had announced the fact after she had fixed it up.

“But, my dearest Pam,” Harington told her, “it’s all wrong. You can’t go to Berlin for two years. It’s all arranged that we should get married within the next few months.”

“Who arranged it?” she asked him with that challenging look which jumped into her eyes now and then.

“Fate,” he told her, “and the estate agents in Kensington, and my love for you.”

“Leaving me out?” she asked. “Willy-nilly, so to speak?”

“Not leaving you out,” he told her. “Putting you right in the middle of the picture and the most beautiful object therein. Sometimes I wish you weren’t so beautiful and so lovely in mind and spirit. I shall be very much distracted from my duties in the House of Commons.” He grinned at her but meant what he

said.

"This beautiful creature," answered Pamela, "so lovely in mind and spirit—God save the Wrens!—will not distract you for at least two years. You'll be able to get on with your political career undistracted by a critic on the hearth."

They had fenced with each other like Beatrice and Benedick. It was in the garden of Longacre during an amazing summer which went on and on without rain, and with one golden day after another. The lawns of Longacre were already brown in early summer. The rose garden was a glory of colour where Lady Bramley spent much time snipping off the heads of the dead blooms to make way for young buds. Presently Harington spoke seriously, with emotion.

"Pam, don't go to Berlin. It's not playing fair. I want you. I thought you wanted me. All through the War in the North African desert—and lots of places—I dreamed of this time. I yearned for it like a parched man craves for water. Now you dash the cup from my lips. Damned cruelty, I call it."

Pamela Faraday fluttered her eyelashes, avoiding the passion in his eyes.

"Kit," she said, "I don't want to be heartless. I love you very much but I don't want marriage just yet and I've made no promise. We're not formally or informally engaged. I feel quite free to plan my own life for a while. I want to get more experience. I feel so young and immature. We're both Babes in the Wood, and marriage is a difficult relationship anyhow."

"Why difficult?" he asked. "It's natural. It's nature's law."

"One has to adjust oneself to the other person," said Pamela, thoughtfully. "Mutual give and take, the surrender of one's own egotism. And sometimes one side loves more than the other. There's a French proverb about that. *Entre deux amants il y a toujours un gui aime et l'autre qui se laisse aimer.* It's always a bit of a risk, Kit. Look at all the unhappy war marriages!"

"Are you funking marriage?" he asked. "Are you afraid of it, Pam?"

"A little bit," she admitted, with a shy laugh. "Anyhow I'm not ready for it. I want my freedom. I want to see things and do things. I'm keen on this experience in Berlin. Kit, be patient, won't you? Give me a little rope."

They had been walking and talking on a grass path between blue cypresses. Suddenly she came close to him and smiled into his very blue eyes filled with trouble, and put her fingers through his carroty hair which looked on fire as a shaft of sun caught it.

"What a baby you are, Kit!" she exclaimed. "You look like a boy who has cut his knees and wants to weep on his mammy's breast."

“Somebody has cut my heart,” he told her. “I’m bleeding inwardly.”

He put his arms round her and kissed her lips though she tried to hold him back.

He had argued with her afterwards, pleaded with her, become angry with her. She countered all his arguments, sometimes gaily, sometimes, but not often, seriously.

He wanted her to give up her job. Was he willing to give up his political career? He had already made a mark for himself on the back benches, perhaps because of his intense vitality and the distinction of his red hair and very blue eyes and whimsical mouth and touch of wit. One of our coming leaders, she had heard it said. One of the brilliant young Tories. If she gave up Berlin would he give up the House of Commons? She asked him that teasingly, as a test.

“By the lord, no!” he answered angrily. “Why the deuce should I?”

“Then why ask me to give up my career? Egoist! Red-poll! Politician!”

“Your career!” he jeered. “Typist-secretary to some nit-wit in uniform.”

“Helping to shape the destiny of Europe!” she answered with mock solemnity.

“Making a hideous mess of it,” answered Harington bitterly. “I say, Pam, chuck it! Give up the idea for my sake.”

“I’ve signed on the dotted line,” she reminded him.

“For how long?”

“Not more than a year, unless I sign on another dotted line.”

“O God!” he cried, not in blasphemy, but prayer. “O God, help me to get some sense into this woman’s head and to soften the hardness of her heart!”

“A year will pass like the whiff of a cigarette,” she told him. “But I may return a different kind of woman—wiser but possibly repulsive.”

“You’re always pulling my leg,” he answered. “You’re always mocking. If you weren’t such a hefty wench I’d put you across my knee and spank you.”

“I’d pull that red hair of yours,” she answered, “I’d make you squeal. I’d defend myself with tooth and claw.”

She had gone to Germany.

Kit Harington was too busy to pine for her and too much interested in the

affairs of life to mope as a melancholy Jacques. As a back-bencher on the Tory side of the House he was excited and amused by the political game which he took seriously, though with that verbal flippancy which he had learnt as President of the Oxford Union. His scarlet hair among bald heads, grey heads and brown heads was as noticeable as a railway signal, and helped to catch the Speaker's eye after the front benches had monopolized a debate. His very pleasant voice and manner and his whimsical smile disarmed even his political opponents when he rose to question them with a desire for information which was not so innocent as it seemed, followed by supplementary questions too artful to please a Government spokesman whatever his gift of evasion.

In the smoking-room of the House he was generally with a group of the younger Conservatives. He was a vivacious, excitable talker because he felt deeply and emotionally about the international situation and the economic crisis at home, getting worse and worse as the months passed. A likable fellow, they thought him in the House of Commons. Those very blue eyes of his under his red hair were often lighted by a charming and rather boyish smile. It was remarked by his friends, not without criticism, that in the smoking-room or the lobbies some of the Labour members went out of their way to chat with him and he seemed to have struck up a close friendship with Halliday Norton, most promising among the tiny group which had survived the wreckage of the old Liberal Party.

"You're too damned tolerant, Harington," said one of his Conservative friends one day. "I saw you in earnest conversation yesterday with that very poisonous fellow Horace Darnsley, 'Our 'Orace', who is mainly responsible for leading this unfortunate country to the edge of the deep black pit. I don't believe in getting on too friendly terms with crypto-Communists and political charlatans, especially when they drop their 'h's' and can't speak the King's English."

Harington laughed at this criticism.

"Snob stuff, Jaggers! It's only by accident and privilege that you and I aspirate certain words. And it doesn't matter a row of beans anyhow. 'Our 'Orace', as you call him, is a very decent fellow and no more a crypto-Communist than you are. At the core of him he's an old-fashioned Liberal like so many of the moderate men on the Labour side, including the P.M. Except for the two extremes we've all taken over the Liberal tradition. That's why so much of this party stuff is very unreal, though I enjoy the game. I'm groping my way towards the idea of a new Party including all those who stand for liberty against totalitarianism. If we could shed some of our own die hards and join forces with the moderate centre we might get this country out of the

ditch."

His friend, who was young Philip Jaggers, stared at him incredulously.

"Shut up, Carrots! You're talking heresy. If you walk along that road, Kit, you'll wreck your political career and have the Whips up against you. Get off it, laddy! The only salvation for this country is to turn those Labour blighters out with all their ignorance and incompetence and class consciousness."

"I wonder if we should do much better?" asked Harington with that disarming smile in his very blue eyes. "We should have to face the same problems of a bankrupt nation drained of dollars. We should have to keep on many of the controls. For the sake of argument..."

He was off again talking partly to discover his own inmost convictions, to get down to the root of things by the Socratic method, and to study every point of view without prejudice. It was very annoying sometimes to his friends who felt naked without prejudice and disarmed without intolerance, and devitalized without the fire of political hatred.

With these political interests and his work as assistant editor of a weekly review on economic affairs, which paid him a living wage supplementing his Parliamentary salary, Christopher Harington did not spend his time sighing as an inconsolable lover, but it was not a case of out of sight out of mind. He kept Pamela in his heart, wrote to her chatty and humorous and affectionate letters, and felt himself hardly treated because her answers were not more frequent than once a month. They were good letters when they came. She had a gift of description and character-drawing and was amusing in her sketches of the staff with whom she was working and some of the other girls with whom she was billeted in what were once workmen's flats in Berlin. Each girl had a tiny bedroom to herself. The bathrooms had to be shared. They lunched in a canteen which had once been a communal restaurant for German working folk. These conditions of life were somewhat primitive and austere but Pamela seemed to be glad of that, and confessed to a feeling of guilt when she was taken out to dinner in some expensive restaurant which was only frequented by British officials and German racketeers making money on the Black Market.

I can't bear to eat and drink [she wrote], *when I think of the semi-starvation of the people in Berlin, the pallid faces of working women, the wretched underfed look of so many men, the thin, pinched look of the children. It's not so bad in the country districts to which I go on excursions now and then—Captain Inchbold is very friendly in that way—but here in Berlin it is ghastly and miserable. All one's hatred of German cruelties evaporates in the*

face of the suffering and hunger of fellow mortals. The desolation of the ruins in which they live—Berlin is one great heap of rubble and twisted iron—and the utter hopelessness which stares out of their eyes, tends to get one down. Pity is one's dominant emotion, at least mine, though I find that other people, like Julian Inchbold, are harder than I am.

Inchbold. Julian Inchbold. That name crept into her letters many times. Presently Harington noticed that she began to call him Julian—a faun-like young man, she described him once. Christopher Harington, reading her letters, did not like the recurrence of that name. He had a distinct twinge of jealousy though he realized that she would inevitably make new friends and could not be denied some social life after working hours. It was natural that colonels and majors on the Allied Control Commission should make rather a fuss of her. But this Julian Inchbold, this faun-like fellow, seemed to be monopolizing her.

Harington questioned her about this young man but in her answering letters she failed to satisfy his morbid curiosity. Then he wrote one letter to her which was more than a weekly narrative of personal affairs.

Dearest heart [he wrote],

Your time of service in Berlin is nearing its end and I look forward eagerly and excitedly to your homecoming. I am already searching around and sending out scouts for a house or flat which will make that home for you, with myself as the slave of the lamp. It's incredibly difficult to do so. London Estate Agents just laugh at one, but sometimes, with a bit of luck, one can hear privately of something going. That is our chance now and I rush this letter by air mail to tell you. Bill Joicey and Phyllis have to leave their little house in Edwardes Square in two months' time when they are going to South Africa. Bill has been offered a first-class job in the School of Mines out there. I have been to see the house. It's a gem, and just the right size for us. Darling, will you let me know without delay if you advise me to take it, if you are willing now to share a home with me, if new friends and scenes have not made me fade out of your mind and heart? Dare I hope for such happiness? Dare I plan for it?

He wrote a postscript hurriedly in one of the writing-rooms in the House of Commons.

I bought an adorable little Queen Anne mirror for your dressing-table this afternoon. I could not resist it. I yearn for the time when I shall look over your shoulders while you are doing your hair in our little home, and in our new life

together. Come back soon!

How very rash of this young man to take her love for granted! They had never been engaged. She had never promised herself to him. They had played Beatrice and Benedick in her father's garden and in others. They had been laughing friends teasing each other but there was no pledge on her side.

When the answer came it was a staggering blow. She wrote in tenderness and kindness but there was the blow which struck at his heart like a sharp dagger. She was very sorry to hurt him, she wrote. She knew his love for her and was glad of it but something had happened. It had come out of the blue, touching her with the madness of primitive passion. She supposed it was that. Julian—Julian Inchbold—had blotted out everything including common sense. She found him irresistible. He had stepped into modern life out of Greek mythology—or perhaps he was just a Gypsy. At first they had just been friendly. But he had made a dead set at her and she hadn't been able to keep him off. Almost immediately she knew that he had put a spell on her. There was something in his eyes which made her feel silly, emotional, out of control. If this passionate love meant anything she was caught up in it. She had tried to fight against it, but Julian had only to raise his little finger and she would follow him barefoot if need be, to a Gypsy camp or a dark forest. He wasn't quite a gentleman. She knew that. But he was her man. She would marry him as soon as he could get demobilized.

I'm sorry, Kit [she wrote]. *I know this will seem like treachery to you but it isn't really. I was quite free. I told you so many times. I've made my own plan of life and that is with Julian Inchbold for better or worse. In a way I can't help myself. In a way I'm like a snared bird. But I love Julian, and that's all there is about it. So don't take the house in Edwardes Square unless, as I hope, there is some other girl who would make you happy there. Susan Greenways? She's very charming and loves you dearly. Or Sybil Bravington, that exquisite little lady like a portrait by Reynolds. In any case, Kit, don't smudge me out of your heart altogether. I shall always love you as a good comrade. How much we have laughed together! How much we have chipped each other, you and I! My love to you now and if you have to forgive me, forgive.*

Christopher Harington was in his bed-sitting-room in Belgrave Road when he read this letter which he found on a chest in the hall downstairs when he returned from a late sitting in the House. In the corner of his room was the little Queen Anne mirror and dressing-table which he had bought at great

expense for Pamela's room in Edwardes Square. He read the letter twice and his fair skin—the fair skin of red-headed men—became slightly pale. He let the letter fall to the floor and stood motionless for a few seconds. Suddenly he gave a queer cry of anguish like a wounded animal, and seizing the mirror raised it above his head and flung it against the iron bars of the fireplace, smashing it badly.

The noise of the crash disturbed the man in the bed-sitting-room next to his, a Home Office man named Jordan with whom Harington exchanged a 'good morning' on the stairs. Harington heard his voice outside the door.

"Anything wrong, old man?"

"A trivial accident," answered Harington. "I smashed a glass, that's all."

"It sounded like the Crystal Palace falling down. Well, good night."

Harington went down on his hands and knees and picked up bits of the broken mirror. Bad luck, didn't they say? Seven years' bad luck. It was childish anyhow to have behaved like that. A man was a fool to lose control like that because of bitter disappointment and frustrated love. Perhaps his love for Pamela was utterly selfish. If he loved her perfectly he would desire only her happiness. This jealousy, this rage, was cave-man stuff. It was uncivilized. It was just egotism and possessiveness.

Harington picked himself up with the bits of broken glass which he put carefully into his wastepaper-basket. Presently he was overcome by emotion again and stifled a harsh groan. He mustn't make noises like that. That damn' fellow in the next room would hear him.

What was the name of that young swine whom Pamela was going to marry? Inchbold—Julian Inchbold. There was a Labour member of that name. Steenie Inchbold who spoke with a rough provincial accent.

Harington's voice—he was a good actor—was very calm and casual in the lavatory of the House of Commons when he asked Steenie Inchbold whether he had a relative on the Allied Control in Berlin.

"My boy Julian," he had answered.

CHAPTER III

Stephen Inchbold, M.P., was glad of the walk, however late, from Westminster to Battersea Park across the bridge to his flat in Overstrand Mansions—unless it was pouring with rain when he took a taxi and grudged the expense. It was refreshing after the fuggy air in the House of Commons, especially after a late debate. There had been a late debate—up to midnight—that day when he had been asked twice whether he had a relative on the Allied Control out in Germany. That coincidence came into his mind as he walked home, though he hadn't thought about it since.

He hoped his boy hadn't done anything scandalous. Why should Lord Bramley make such an enquiry, and young Christopher Harington, that red-headed squib on the Conservative back benches? He was always a bit anxious about Julian, and he had been troubled lately because of the boy's repeated requests for cigarettes which undoubtedly he used for barter in Germany. In his last letter he wrote that he wanted a thousand sent out through the Army and Navy Stores. It didn't seem right to his father. It was unfair on the civilians at home who were going short. It was some kind of a racket which might lead to trouble.

Steenie Inchbold gave a heavy sigh as he crossed the bridge to Battersea Park.

His boy Julian had never been quite straight. He jeered at his father's moral principles and since he had become an officer, mixing with that class, he had been ashamed of his own family. On his last leave he had been home only once and then to ask for money. He had been staying with smart friends in their country houses. Never once had he brought any of them to see his parents—ashamed of their accent no doubt, ashamed of his mother who had been a factory girl—God bless her—and made no pretence about her hard-working life in Rugby before her man had become a Trade Union leader. Julian had announced himself as a Conservative and had been critical about the Labour Government and its political programme. It didn't come well from the son of a Labour M.P. There was such a thing as family loyalty. There was also such a thing as gratitude for parental indulgence and generosity—too much of it and too often. They had been weak with the boy. They had spoilt him.

These thoughts nagged in Inchbold's mind when he paced slowly up the stone stairs to his flat on the third floor.

Light footsteps, travelling faster, caught him up.

"Hullo, Dad! Just back from the House?"

It was his daughter Marjorie who grabbed his despatch case and carried it for him up the remaining stairs.

She was a student at the London School of Economics. He wished she wouldn't smear her mouth with lipstick. She was getting alarmingly pretty. She was getting alarmingly out of hand.

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed. "What have you been doing, you puss? Home at midnight? I don't approve of that for girls of your age."

"Oh, I've been having a great time, Dad. A crowd of us went to one of Mosley's meetings and broke it up. Most exciting!"

"I don't like it," said Stephen Inchbold, gravely. "Girls of nineteen shouldn't run wild in the streets at this time of night. It's all wrong. It worries your mother, it worries me."

"Oh, we can take care of ourselves, Dad! Don't be so old-fashioned. And hurry up with that latchkey. I'm dying for a hot drink and something to fill up the hole in my tummy."

"You're out of hand," said Inchbold. "You're running wild."

He opened the door of his flat and greeted his wife who came into the hall. She always waited up for him however late he was. She always had the kettle boiling to make him a cup of cocoa, as she had done all through their married life, mostly with uncertain hours due to night shifts and day shifts. She must have been pretty as a factory girl. She still had a beautiful colour. She had given her good looks to Julian and Marjorie.

"Sorry I'm so late, Mother. A long debate on Foreign Affairs."

"I listened to a report of it on the wireless, dearie. Good gracious, there's Marjorie at last. I've been worrying myself sick about the child."

"How silly of you, Mum!" cried Marjorie. "I told you I'd be late."

"Not as late as this. It's disgraceful, it really is. My dad would have thrashed me with his belt if I had come back at midnight."

"Oh, your dad was a devil, Mum," answered Marjorie carelessly. "One of the old-fashioned tyrants. Gosh, I'm hungry. What about eats? I'll raid the larder."

She flitted away while Stephen Inchbold was helped out of his greatcoat by

the little woman with the complexion of a rose whom he called ‘Mother’.

“You’re looking tired, dearie,” she told him. “You’ll have a break-down one day if you go on like this. It’s all those committee meetings and conferences.”

“One has to do one’s job,” he answered. “And it’s worth doing.” He gave a quiet laugh in which there was a note of pride.

“Will you be surprised, Mother, if you’re the wife of a Cabinet Minister one of these fine days?”

“Oh, dearie!” exclaimed Mrs. Inchbold, without any joy in her voice. “I couldn’t live up to it. I wish I was back in our little old house in Rugby when we were homely folk like our neighbours.”

Inchbold ignored this lament.

“The P.M. sent for me today,” he said. “He was very kind and generous, I must say. ‘Steenie,’ he said, ‘you’ve been doing fine work on the committees, especially with the Transport Bill. I’d like to find a place for you in the Government one day. As a back-bencher you’ve earned the respect of everybody—even the Opposition, and that broadcast you made the other night on Pride of Work was very moving. First class, Inchbold. The sort of stuff we want. Inspiring!’ ”

Inchbold quoted these words as though he had learnt them by heart. He *had* learnt them by heart. That half-promise of finding him a place in the Government had not been said idly. A Cabinet Minister? That would be the high reward for all his toil, his loyalty to Labour, his Trade Union leadership.

Mrs. Inchbold had something else on her mind. It seemed to her more important than her husband’s political career.

“Dad! There’s a letter from Julian. He’s going to get married.”

Inchbold raised his eyebrows, his spiky eyebrows, and laughed uneasily.

“That’s likely to cost me a bit of money. Who’s the girl? Some German wench?”

“No,” said his wife, with distress in her voice. “I’d rather it was. It would be more in our style. It quite takes my breath away. She’s the daughter of a lord.”

“What lord?” asked Inchbold, sharply. “You must have got it wrong, Mother. It’s absurd.”

“That’s what he writes, as plain as plain. Pamela Faraday, the daughter of

Lord Bramley. Did you ever hear anything like it, dearie. It makes me go hot and cold.”

“Good heavens!” exclaimed Inchbold. “Bramley? That’s why he asked me that question today. The daughter of Lord Bramley and our Julian? No, it’s impossible! It’s incredible! It’s daft!”

“He wants me to send him some more cigarettes,” said Mrs. Inchbold. “He’s up to his usual tricks, I suppose. I just can’t believe it about the lord’s daughter. It’s silly. Dad, you mustn’t let him make a fool of us like that.”

Marjorie came back from the kitchen with a cry of woe.

“Not a darned thing in the larder!” she cried. “Nothing but a mouldy piece of cheese and some stale bread. Oh, my gizzard, oh, my guts! Pa, have you any pull with the Ministry of Food?”

She put a hand on her stomach and groaned horribly.

“I’ll open a tin of soup for you, dearie,” said Mrs. Inchbold. “I tried to get some cakes this morning but I was at the end of the queue and they were all gone when I reached the counter.”

“Poor old Ma!” exclaimed Marjorie sympathetically. “Why don’t you do a bit on the Black Market?”

Inchbold smiled at this outrageous daughter who had gone wild lately but still held a sure place in his heart.

“Marjorie,” he said, “your brother Julian is going to marry the daughter of a lord. How do you feel about it? Will it weaken your democratic convictions as taught by the London School of Economics, or will you join the snobs and the bloated aristocracy?”

“Gosh!” cried Marjorie. “The Inchbolds are going up in the world.”

Then she gave a hoot of laughter.

“Just like Julian! One of our social climbers. Ashamed of his own family. Snob of snobs. I’m sorry for the girl.”

“You’ve said it,” answered her father gravely.

Mrs. Inchbold put up a defence for Julian, her only son, whose neglect of her lately was a secret grief.

“You’re both very unkind to the poor boy. In spite of all his faults he has a heart of gold, as I’ve always told you.”

“Sorry, Mother!” said Inchbold, mildly. “I know Julian twists you round

his little finger. What about that cup of cocoa?”

He winked at Marjorie when Mrs. Inchbold went into the little kitchen.

“Your mother dotes on that boy,” he said in a low voice.

“He’s a spiv,” said Marjorie.

“What exactly is a spiv?” asked her father. “They’ve been throwing that word about lately in the House.”

Marjorie’s definition was not favourable to that type of humanity.

CHAPTER IV

AMIDST the ruin and desolation of Berlin a young officer named Captain Julian Inchbold had been using his good looks, and he was very good-looking, to fascinate a girl named Pamela Faraday who was in the secretariat of the Allied Control Commission. She was the secretary of his own chief, Major Briggs, whom he disliked intensely.

It had been an easy and pleasant game. Pamela's eyes had fluttered when he had looked into them for the first time, and she had avoided any direct meeting of eyes as though afraid of the spell in his. That was at a dinner arranged by Major Briggs, that very conventional officer, in one of the few restaurants above-ground in Berlin. It was his birthday and he was celebrating it in this way with three of his assistants. The third guest was Elsie Venner who shared the same workman's flat with Pamela.

It was the first time Pamela had sat at table with Julian Inchbold as he had only recently come to Berlin. Her first thought about him was slightly hostile.

'That young man is too good-looking,' she thought, 'and he thinks he is very beautiful.'

Then she thought: 'He is certainly very beautiful. He is like a beautiful animal. His brown eyes are like a deer's. I seem to have seen him sculptured in marble with vine leaves in his hair. Apollo? More likely Dionysus, the god of wine. Or just a laughing satyr on a Greek vase! He's a bit common I should say. He doesn't seem quite sure of himself with Major Briggs and Elsie.'

He talked a little too much. He laughed a little too much. He was unnecessarily rude to one of the German waiters. Pamela Faraday noticed all that, but she also knew that when he could catch her eyes, when he smiled into them, something touched her blood and made her feel 'queer'. He went out of his way to be polite and friendly to her. He made her laugh by one or two good stories about the War in Italy when he had been billeting officer of his battalion. He could imitate the Italian peasants very well and had picked up a smattering of their language and dialect.

'He's really very nice,' she thought later in the evening. 'He's quite amusing and it isn't fair to blame him for being so terribly good-looking.'

That night Elsie Venner, who had a tiny bedroom next to Pamela's, had

something to say about Julian Inchbold.

“A nasty bit of work, I should say.”

“Think so?” asked Pamela with a slight yawn. “I was rather attracted by him.”

Elsie Venner laughed a little maliciously.

“I could see that! He made a dead set at you. Perhaps I’m jealous. But watch your step, my child. That young man is dangerous.”

That young man showed no sign of being excessively dangerous for some time. At the week-ends he offered the use of his car to both Elsie and Pamela and took them for excursions into the woods around the Havelsee, a very attractive lake in early spring.

He divided his attentions fairly between Elsie and Pamela though by some instinct of womanhood Pamela knew that she was the favoured one. Something in his eyes told her that, a sudden quick smile, a turn of the head, an intonation of the voice. Perhaps Elsie knew that too. One day when an excursion had been arranged she jibbed and refused to go.

“I shan’t join you this afternoon, my child,” she told Pamela in their flat.

“Why not?” asked Pamela. “It’s glorious weather, warm enough for bathing.”

“I’m sick of playing gooseberry to you and young Inchbold. He only takes me as cover against gossip.”

“Oh, nonsense!” cried Pamela, but a sudden flame of colour touched her cheeks.

“In any case,” said Elsie, “I have a perfectly good invitation to a picnic with some of the others. Two Americans are going to join us. One of them is the son of a billionaire in Chicago. I might step from my typewriter to a marble palace with twenty bathrooms. Quite a chance!”

“But I promised Julian we would go,” protested Pamela. “We can’t let him down at the last moment. He’s providing the tea basket.”

Elsie Venner laughed in her faintly malicious way.

“He’ll be delighted to know that I’ve fallen out. It’s what he’s been waiting for. Take care of yourself, my little innocent one.”

It was the first time that Pamela went out alone with Julian. It was by no means the last time. They began to make a habit of it, a motor drive to the lake,

a Sunday picnic in the woods away from places where they were likely to meet any of the Allied Commission. It was not quite wise. Pamela knew that. There was sure to be gossip and perhaps a little scandal. Not quite wise? No, but very pleasant to get away from the sight of ruins, to hear birds sing, to watch the sparkle of sunlight on broad waters, to lie on the grass with a young man who was certainly very good-looking and who took no liberties. He was amusing, boyish, and absurdly respectful. What could be wrong with that? Why be a coward of convention?

Absurdly respectful sometimes. He was unduly impressed by the fact that she was the daughter of Lord Bramley and alluded to it several times as though he could not get it out of his head.

"It's cheek of me to be talking to you like this," he said one day when they were sitting together on the edge of the Havelsee. It was a Saturday afternoon in May, and the sun was warm upon them and the lake was like burnished gold and the woods around them were exquisite in their first glory of green—each leaf like a little green flame.

"Why cheek?" she asked, laughing at him. "It's very nice of you to be talking to me."

"You're the daughter of Lord Bramley," he answered. "One of the Elder Statesmen, one of the Big Bugs. Gosh!"

"He's very simple and human," she told him. "There's nothing alarming about him."

"You must be a rich young woman," he said. "I can't think why you're out here earning a meagre wage as a secretary-typist in the Allied Control."

"You've got it all wrong," she assured him. "My father finds it hard to make both ends meet. He's living on capital and not too much of that. Besides, I want to do an honest job of work; and I want to get behind the scenes of history. I find all this vastly interesting, though very tragic."

"Tragic?"

"All this ruin," she answered, looking away from the lake in the direction of Berlin which she could see only in her mind's eye—that great capital with its skeleton houses, bomb-shattered streets, masses of broken stone and twisted iron.

"I'm sorry for the German people—all those women and girls prowling about the ruins, coming up from damp cellars and beginning to get really hungry. The children make my heart ache, poor little ones!"

Julian laughed lightly.

“They asked for it, didn’t they? I don’t feel a twinge of pity for them.”

They had an argument about that. She accused him of being heartless. He retaliated by calling her a sentimentalist.

She had questioned him about his own family, but he had been very vague about that. Once he told her that they had lived in Rugby. He had been to school at Rugby.

“Oh, then you must know Billy Arkwright. He was there. A friend of my brother Timothy.”

“Oh, I expect he was in another form,” answered Julian carelessly. “One didn’t know all the fellows.”

“But he was captain of the First Eleven,” said Pamela.

“Oh lord, yes. That chap. Yes, of course.”

Julian always seemed to have plenty of money. He was particular about German wine which was not cheap. He had bought his car which took them on each pleasant excursion. Once she accused him of being extravagant.

“You can’t possibly do this on your pay, Julian. I hope you’re not getting into debt or anything foolish like that. Do your people give you a handsome allowance?”

“Not a bean,” he told her. “But I’m making quite a bit on the Black Market. Cigarettes for German marks. German marks for English quids until they stopped it. It’s as easy as falling off a log.”

He could see that he had shocked her. There was a look of doubt in her eyes, and in her voice, when she spoke.

“Is that quite honourable, Julian? Isn’t it rather a low-down game?”

“Low down? On the contrary. It’s high finance and everybody’s doing it. I should’ve been a fool if I didn’t.... Cripes! Look at that German girl just about to dive. She has the figure of the Venus of Milo.”

They bathed that afternoon again, and shyly she looked at his figure. Yes, he was like a Greek faun, his brown limbs with a faint glint of golden hair on them. That afternoon he made love to her, and she could not resist him. His kisses were warm on her lips. During that early summer they wandered hand in hand through German woods on Saturday afternoons and Sundays, and hand in hand sometimes by night in the ruins of Berlin on their way to a cabaret or an underground restaurant. In the day-time German girls smiled at him and

looked enviously at her. There was some magic about him—she knew its lure and its power—which made all girls smile at him with softness in their eyes. He would only have to crook one finger and any girl, almost, would come to him.

"You're a Don Juan!" she told him once. "I'm afraid you have had many love affairs before you met me."

"A few," he admitted light-heartedly. "But they were nothing except passing episodes. You're the first girl I've loved seriously and I love you as Adam loved Eve in the beginning of time. I love the look of you and the mind of you and the body of you, and the beauty that shines in your eyes. But I'm a bit afraid of you."

"Afraid of me? No, I can't believe that!"

"You're on such a high pedestal of honour and virtue, and you're the daughter of the Right Hon. Lord Bramley. I shan't be able to live up to you."

She had been abashed by this exaggerated homage to her virtue in which she had no great confidence and in this humility and self abasement by Julian.

"I hope there won't be any living up to or living down to," she answered, laughing at him. "Let's start on the level with equality of love, my dear. Let's make it a high level, as high as heaven."

"In any case you're adorable," he told her and she liked being told, especially when he had his arms round her and she nestled close to him and felt safe and wonderfully happy with her love, except that it made her feel a little selfish and unduly favoured among women. In the background of her love was this frightful city of ruin, the ruin not only of stones and marble, of palaces and churches and monuments, but the ruin of human lives without any chance of health or happiness. These Berliners looked gaunt and pallid, and in their eyes was a kind of deadness of despair. She shirked looking into their eyes. It is not amusing to look into dead eyes, and tortured eyes. During the War she had had no love for Germans. As a nation they had done terrible and frightful things, unbelievable in their cruelty until one had to believe. But now in their downfall and misery she pitied them, especially the young mothers with their children and the pretty girls still putting up an outward show of style, who came up from the underground shelters and cellars under piles of rubble where they were herded together. So many of these girls were willing to sell themselves to any British or American soldier for a few cigarettes or a meal somewhere. Julian told that with a laugh and she had shivered.

"Don't laugh, Julian. It's too awful. I can't bear to think of it."

"You're too sensitive, Pam," he answered. "Life is like that. Life on the whole, especially now, is a dirty business."

"Let's keep clean," she cried. "Oh, Julian, how thankful I am for our love in the midst of all this evil and misery!"

She was warned off Julian by some of her friends but it made no dent in her mind or heart.

"If I were you, Miss Faraday," said Major Briggs one day, "I wouldn't go about too much with that fellow Inchbold. He's not quite sound. You know what I mean."

"No, I don't know what you mean," she had answered angrily.

"I'm talking to you as a friend," said Major Briggs quietly. "He's not quite out of the top drawer. See what I mean? Not up to your mark, young woman. Your father's daughter——"

"Please leave my father's name out of this conversation," she had said a little heatedly. "I am here as Pamela Faraday, typist on the Allied Control. Because my father happens to be a public figure——"

"Well, I've had my little say," answered Major Briggs good-naturedly. "Strictly between ourselves, of course. Don't report back to young Inchbold."

She had ignored this warning and others. Elsie Venner had been one of the backbiters. Things were difficult after a painful scene one night when Elsie had called Julian a 'quirk' and a 'spiv'.

"Those are new words to me," Pamela had said, "but I've no doubt you mean them to be offensive and for that reason I shall slap your face."

She had gone over to Elsie and slapped her across the face with the back of her hand in a sudden rage and passion, utterly unlike herself, contrary to everything in her upbringing and family tradition—like some street girl who had been drinking and quarrelling. Was it because even then she had some secret doubt about Julian? Was it some little devil doubt within herself which made her so furious when Elsie flung beastly names at him?

Elsie had been frightened by this physical attack, and was utterly taken aback and dismayed. She began to whimper.

"Oh, Pam! How could you do such a thing? It's only because I love you that I want to warn you off Julian. Nobody trusts him. He's too beautiful to be true. And he doesn't tell the truth. Half his stories are just made up. Peter has checked up on some of them. I don't want you to get caught, Pam. You're too

good to go dancing off to the pipes of Pan with a young satyr who has goat's feet in his boots."

It was an extraordinary thing to say. Pamela had turned quite white when she heard those words, remembering her first impression of Julian as a Greek faun, as a young satyr with vine leaves in his hair. Dionysus.

"I'm going to marry Julian," she said presently, "I shan't invite you to the wedding."

She was a little conscience-stricken about Christopher Harington who wrote to her regularly, nice, chatty, affectionate letters. Always looking forward to her return. He had made up his mind, poor dear, that she was going to marry him one day, and if it hadn't been for this passion which had caught hold of her, this physical emotion which came to her at the sight and touch of Julian, she would perhaps have married him. She had been hand-in-glove with Kit for a time. She still liked him immensely. They had played golf together, never very seriously. They had indulged in verbal battles—'back chat' as he called it—vastly enjoying themselves. But that was before the War. Now they were eight years older and Kit was a Conservative M.P. who had already made a name on the back benches though she couldn't take him very seriously as a politician. Anyhow he was taking too much for granted as far as she was concerned. She had never promised to marry him. There was no formal or informal engagement. As she had told him, she regarded herself as a free woman. Still, poor Kit, dear Kit! She would hate to hurt him, and he would be hurt, dreadfully hurt perhaps, when she told him about Julian, her Dionysus.

She spoke to Julian about Kit one day. It was the day he first kissed her on the strand of the Havelsee.

"I ought not to let you make love to me like this, Julian."

He raised his fair eyebrows.

"Why not? Am I repulsive to you?"

"There's a man in England who loves me very much. I shall hurt him frightfully if I tell him about this."

"Curse the fellow! Who is he?"

"It's Kit Harington. One of the young Conservatives in the House of Commons."

Julian took the news lightly.

"Quite a lad! Gets off some rather good stuff now and then and asks

amusing things at question time to the annoyance of the Labour Ministers. Well, don't worry about him. Let's forget him."

"I shall never do that," said Pamela quickly. "I don't forget those who love me."

"How many?" asked Julian, grinning at her. "Tell me about your love affairs."

"Nothing to tell. Only boy-and-girl flirtations."

"Incredible!" he answered teasingly.

In her letters to Kit she mentioned Julian a good many times. It was deliberately done to give him a little warning. And then at last she wrote that letter which made him break a Queen Anne mirror and risk seven years' bad luck.

There was one incident which distressed her because it showed that Julian was not always truthful with her, and to her truth was the first condition of friendship and of all human relationships and above all a fundamental point of confidence and trust between two lovers. There could be no love built upon deceit or any falsity.

It was only a trivial affair and perhaps she made too much of it. It happened one evening when she and Julian were at a cocktail party given by a young man named Peter Lampson who was sweet on Elsie Venner, and was a very amusing person, violent in his opinions and political prejudices, but otherwise harmless.

"Anybody want to hear the six o'clock bulletin from that power house of doctored news and Left Wing propaganda, commonly called the B.B.C.?"

So he had asked after a glance at a little German clock on his mantelshelf.

Two of the company desired to hear the news which was a catalogue of gloom and tragedy. More shootings in Palestine; another massacre in the Punjab; guerilla fighting in Greece; more austerities in England outlined by Sir Stafford Cripps; another strike threatened in the coal-mines; opposition to the Marshall Plan in Congress; a speech by Molotov abusing England and the United States. After a few minutes of this Peter Lampson's friends began to chatter again.

"Not very cheerful all that!" said Pamela. "More sacrifice for English housewives, poor dears. Fewer clothing coupons. Less fats. Oh, dear, oh dear!"

"What can we expect, dear lady?" asked Peter Lampson. "As long as we

have a Labour Government we shall advance steadily like sleepwalkers to the edge of the black pit of ruin. Those dreadful people! I'm leaning towards a belief in tyranniside. I'm in favour of a revolt by the Middle Classes on behalf of liberty and private enterprise. Barricades in Pall Mall. An attack on the House of Commons, by an Army Corps of housewives armed with brooms and mops."

"You know you're talking nonsense, Peter," said Pamela, laughing at him.

"I hope I don't offend the susceptibilities of anybody here," answered Peter with mock courtesy. "I mean if we have any crypto-Communists among us ——"

He glanced at Julian Inchbold with a faintly suspicious smile.

"Don't look at me like that," said Julian, rather heatedly. "I'm a true blue Conservative. I detest Labour."

"Oh," said Peter. "I'm glad to hear it. I thought you might be related to that dreadful man Inchbold on the Labour benches of the House of Commons. Drops all his 'h's'. One of the bosses of the T.U.C. which dictates the Government policy behind the scenes. Are you, by the way?"

Pamela saw Julian's face flush suddenly.

"I didn't come here to be insulted," he said.

Peter waved his hand and spilt a drop of gin as he did so.

"My dear fellow, no offence meant! We all have regrettable relatives. I have an aunt who is a secret drinker. Drinks like a fish and throws table-knives about. Very unfortunate for the family!"

It was a week or so later when Julian had come round to Pamela's room that there was a sequel to the incident at Peter Lampson's party—when Julian had got so hot under the collar at the suggestion that he was related to the Labour member Stephen Inchbold. He took out an envelope from his pocket and used the letter in it as a spill to light a cigarette from the electric fire. He dropped the envelope and presently Pamela picked it up to put in the wastepaper-basket. Her eyes caught some words written on the back.

From Stephen Inchbold, M.P.

"That's funny," she exclaimed.

“What’s funny?” asked Julian, carelessly.

“Your letter is from that Labour man. Julian, why does he write to you?”

For a moment Julian hesitated. Then he laughed and coloured up slightly.

“As a matter of fact he’s my father.”

“Your father?”

Pamela was astounded by these words and she felt herself becoming a little pale.

“But, Julian, you denied all relationship with him when Peter questioned you the other night.”

“Not at all,” answered Julian, “I said I hadn’t come there to be insulted. He was jeering at my father because he dropped his ‘h’s’, which as a matter of fact he doesn’t often do.”

“But, Julian, it was a denial of relationship. It was like Peter—the other Peter who denied Christ.”

“My dear child!” said Julian, laughing rather uneasily. “Don’t exaggerate a trivial affair. I was slightly irritated by that snob Peter——”

“But you deceived *me*,” said Pamela. “You have never told me that your father was a Labour member. Why not, Julian? Why not tell me everything? Surely I have a right to know. Unless there is truth between us——”

Julian refused to take the matter seriously.

“I was keeping it up my sleeve for a little while. I thought it might shock you to know that my father was on the Labour side. As the daughter of Lord Bramley, one of the Tory leaders, you might have held it up against me. I was going to tell you, of course, in due time.”

She was sitting on the floor between his knees in front of the little electric fire, and she did not answer for a moment or two.

“Julian, I don’t like it,” she said, very gravely. “You aren’t frank with me. You’ve always avoided my questions when I asked about your family. Are you ashamed of them?”

“They’re all right,” he answered lightly. “Poor but honest! I don’t see eye to eye with my honoured sire. I’ve switched over to the other side of the political game. It’s all a racket, this Labour stuff.”

Pamela was silent again for a few moments. Then she asked a question.

“Julian, did you really go to Rugby? You didn’t know Billy Arkwright.”

Julian laughed again rather loudly in a forced way.

“Certainly I went to Rugby but not to the snob school. I went to Rugby Grammar School where doubtless I was better educated.”

Pamela withdrew herself from her position between his knees. She stood up and went to the window but could not see into the darkness outside.

“Peeved with me, O lovely lady?” asked Julian presently.

She turned upon him and spoke angrily.

“More than peeved. Bewildered and deeply hurt.”

“Oh, come now,” said Julian, “you’re making a mountain out of a molehill!”

“I hate falsity and pretence,” said Pamela.

Julian went over to her and took hold of her arms.

“What a tragedy queen you are!” he exclaimed. “I wasn’t in the least degree untruthful but I dislike people prying into my private affairs. Not that there’s anything to hide. Apart from a touch of shyness in a simple and open-hearted guy. Haven’t you found that out by now?”

He looked at her with laughing eyes which seemed to her very frank and very boyish. How could she resist that irresistible smile? Perhaps she had misjudged him. Perhaps she had made too much fuss about all this. Perhaps she had thought he was untruthful when he was only shy and reticent. So she thought, under the spell of his attraction, giving him the benefit of the doubt, or at least crushing the doubt down into her subconscious mind from which sometimes, especially in a wakeful night, it reappeared.

Now that Julian had told her about his family he seemed bothered about the political gulf between his father and hers.

“Won’t it lead to trouble?” he asked her once.

“What kind of trouble?”

“Every kind of trouble like that which happened to Romeo and Juliet. You know, the Montagues and the Capulets! ‘A plague on both your houses.’ I played the part of Juliet as a boy of fifteen at Rugby—Grammar School I mean—I made quite a hit.”

He gave her a sideways smile at this reference to Rugby.

“I dare say Mother may be a little violent when she hears,” admitted Pamela. “She is not exactly tolerant of the Labour Government. In some of her letters she calls them all sorts of names.”

“I agree with her,” said Julian. “A bunch of crooks—mostly. But I don’t want to take poison—like Romeo—in Westminster Abbey or St. Martin’s crypt because your father and mother object to your marriage with the son of a Labour member, who drops his ‘h’s’ now and then.”

Pamela laughed at this apprehension.

“My father is very wise and tolerant. Mother may make a spot of trouble.”

“Seriously,” said Julian—it was not often he said ‘seriously’—“I’m a trifle timid when I come to think of it. After all, your father is a Peer of the Realm, and after all, my father was foreman in the railway yards at Rugby. There’s a bit of difference, isn’t there? I shall have to eat humble pie at her ladyship’s table, if I ever get a seat there.”

Pamela dismissed all that as a fantasy.

“There’s no such thing as caste nowadays, thank goodness. All that has gone with the wind.”

“I’m not so sure,” said Julian, doubtfully. “I tremble in every limb at the thought of making my bow to your lady mother.”

He did not tremble in any limb at the thought of it. He was a young man of great self assurance though he had claimed that he was shy. At least he was a good actor and could adopt the right pose in any company.

CHAPTER V

"THE world situation," said Harington—that 'red-headed squib' as somebody called him—"is beyond words, frightful. What are we going to do about it, Jaggers?"

He was dining with his friend Philip Jaggers in a little restaurant they had frequented lately in a side street off Knightsbridge near Montpelier Square. It had 'atmosphere', they thought, and the food was not poisonous so far. It was run by an elderly Russian and his daughter Natalia, the latter born after her father's escape from the Red Army with General Wrangel and his broken battalions in the Crimea. In Constantinople Sergei Alexandrovich Miliukov, then a young fellow of nineteen, had danced in the Petits Champs, on the Pera side of the Galata Bridge. Then he had served in a cabaret in Berlin after Kemal Pasha had crossed to Istanbul. Later he had starved in Germany in the time of inflation when the mark had gone to millions for a tram-ticket. He reached Paris very hungry, became an employee of the Galeries Lafayette, married the daughter of a Russian countess who was a sempstress in a dress-making establishment in the Place Vendôme, became a waiter again in a Russian restaurant at the top of the Boule Miche, made a lot of money by tips from rich Americans, set up a little restaurant of his own in Nice which was surprisingly successful, and just before the Second World War came to England with his wife who died of pneumonia in an English winter, leaving him with his pretty Natalia and this little restaurant near Montpelier Square. During the War they had slept in the cellar through many terrifying air raids and now, after the War, they were making money again in a moderate way; all of which story had been told to Christopher Harington with humorous detail by Sergei Alexandrovich Miliukov who made friends with his clients.

The small tables had blue-and-white check cloths; there was a Russian ikon in one of the corners and a samovar on one of the shelves. Some atrocious oil-paintings hung on the walls, bought for sheer charity by Sergei from some of his artistic and poverty-stricken friends, and on one wall was a large and terrible portrait of Mr. Winston Churchill for whom Sergei had a profound though humorous admiration.

Christopher Harington who dined here frequently became familiar with the regular *clientèle* about whom he learnt something from the *patron*.

There were several elderly ladies who lived in bed-sitting-rooms in the

neighbourhood of Montpelier Square and, if they could afford it, had dinner here twice a week to eke out their rations and save on their electric fires. One of them, somewhat over-painted, was the widow of an Indian Civil Servant who had been knighted for his long service when he retired to a small house in Surrey on a moderate pension. She was Lady Maggs, very much alone in the world except for a Pekinese whom she fed with scraps of her own food under cover of the table-cloth.

Another regular client was the well-known comedian Wellington Giles, employed by the B.B.C. in its Light programme during which time he dropped all his ‘h’s’ and adopted a husky drink-sodden voice according to the tradition of English humour. Three times a week after the seven o’clock news millions listened to his Cockney songs and stories with laughter and delight according to all reports reaching Broadcasting House. On the three other nights he dined at this restaurant, a most melancholy looking little man, with a thin, pallid face and an undernourished look. While he dined alone he read detective stories which seemed to increase his melancholy, but when he talked occasionally with Sergei it was remarked by Kit Harington’s quick ear that he did not drop his ‘h’s’ and spoke in the cultured voice of a B.B.C. announcer.

An elderly husband and wife, entirely without conversation having nothing more to say to each other, dined often at one of the corner tables. Several students and research workers—male and female—from the Imperial College of Science talked earnestly on physics and mineralogy with occasional excursions into ballet and symphony concerts. A Chinese student appeared from time to time silent but smiling; and among the other ‘regulars’ was a young composer of music named Rudolf Hartmann who intrigued Kit Harington by reading musical scores during his meal as ordinary mortals might read the *Evening Standard* and who would actually scribble bits of music out of his head on the back of envelopes or that night’s menu card.

These people, with casual customers of many types from the neighbourhood, kept Sergei and his daughter busy, except on evenings when for some reason of climate or habit or counter-attraction the little restaurant was almost empty.

It was almost empty that evening when Harington uttered the remark about the state of the world and enquired what they were going to do about it.

Philip Jaggers grinned at him over an *escalope de veau*.

“Meaning you and me, Kit, or the world in general?”

“Meaning you and me,” answered Harington, fixing his friend with his very blue eyes. “Meaning also our Conservative colleagues and our Labour

Ministers and their back-benchers; and the people in this restaurant—that painted old jezebel; that comedian over there looking so damn' miserable; those earnest young people from the Imperial College of Science. Only two of them tonight by the way. Probably the others can't afford a meal before next week's pay packet."

"What bug is biting you now?" asked Philip Jaggers of the Middle Temple. "What do you want us to do? Burst into tears, and say all this is very dreadful? Hold a prayer meeting in Trafalgar Square? Anyhow, let's have some more beer."

Kit Harington developed his ideas.

"Jaggers, you self-indulgent egoist, I'm getting alarmed. As Hitler remarked on more than one occasion, my patience is becoming exhausted. We're all behaving like ostriches with our heads in the sand and our backsides exposed to view."

"Don't be vulgar," answered Jaggers. "What's your grouse this evening? By what ridiculous and far-fetched thesis are you going to drag me into an argument and spoil my hour of ease and refreshment? I want some more beer, Sergei, my aristocratic Slav, another bottle of beer, if you please."

"At once, Mr. Jaggers," said Sergei.

Harington thrust his fingers through his red hair as though to liberate his thoughts.

"We're all deliberately turning our eyes away from ugly and menacing realities," he said. "Here are you and I sitting quite complacently over this *escalope de veau*——"

"Beautifully cooked. I will say our Sergei is a master."

"—While there are forces gathering in the world and bearing down on this island population which menace our food supplies, our last reserves of wealth, and the morale of our people."

Philip Jaggers gave a quiet laugh.

"Very humorous, my little one! A talented imitation of a Labour Minister trying to persuade the miners to sweat a bit more for higher wages."

Harington answered his laugh.

"I know! It sounds funny. I could twist it into comedy. If there's a Devil, which I firmly believe, he must be laughing like hell at the idiocy of Man. But I'm going to drop being flippant about it. It's getting beyond a joke. The end of

it is death."

"Been drinking, laddy?" asked Philip Jaggers. "One over the eight before coming to this chop-house?"

Harington smiled in his absurdly boyish way and then glared at his friend.

"I'm getting fed up with this party game of make-believe. We ought to get all the best brains in the country together to face a so-called crisis, which—unless we handle it in time—will get us all down. Poor little Attlee and his crowd are over-burdened. They're not big enough to carry all this alone with a running fight on party lines. If our own crowd came in they would be just as ineffective, paralysed by party intensity and representing only a section of the people. There would still be the same political cleavage and party make-believe. Meanwhile we're sliding down the slippery slope. We must pull back, and pull together, as a united nation."

"Still harping on that string?" asked Jaggers, impatiently.

Harington nodded.

"It's becoming an obsession with me. When I listen to those fellows on the Government front bench, and when I hear a sham attack led by the Opposition, I'm horrified by the insincerity of it all while we drift towards the rocks."

Philip Jaggers ordered a *pêche Melba* before pronouncing any further opinion. Then in due time he spoke.

"You're losing your sense of humour. It's no good taking all this seriously for the simple reason that we can't do a damn' thing about it."

"We can!" insisted Harington. "We must! That's my point."

Jaggers ignored his point. It was his turn to do a bit of talking.

"This country, once rich and proud and arrogant, is now living on charity—God bless Mr. Marshall who is coming to our aid if he can convert the backwoodsmen in Congress. But what can you and I do about it, my child? What can anyone do? There's a world shortage of food owing to increases of population. Our reserves of wealth have been dissipated in two world wars. You can't eat your cake and have it. We've eaten our cake. At the moment we can get markets for our export drive, but presently those markets, saturated with mass-produced goods, will close against us. Then what? Meanwhile, I agree, we live in a dream of make-believe. All our export targets don't bring us anywhere near national solvency. This food we're eating is subsidized. These potatoes, getting scarce, are subsidized. This bread, which Sergei gives us contrary to regulations, is subsidized; and the Labour Government daren't tell

the country the real truth. Not even Stafford Cripps tells the whole truth or anything like it. Why? Because they're all in a blue funk. They're frightened men. It makes me smile when I watch them putting up a bluff on the front benches. But I have a certain amount of sympathy with them. None of us can afford to look truth in the face. It's too ugly. The best philosophy of life is 'live for the moment and make the best of it. Eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die.' I find that amusing and even wise in a way. It's like the stories of Boccacio written to take people's minds off the plague which was raging around them and choosing its victims among them."

"Horrible!" exclaimed Harington. "The philosophy of despair which I abhor. Not in our stars, dear Brutus..."

He gave a sudden laugh at the profundity of his friend's gloom, so far exceeding his. Then he spoke seriously again.

"I have the courage to look truth in the face as far as I can see it. It's pretty damn' awful but I'm not going to sit down in the mud and say 'the worst is bound to happen'. It needn't happen; if we all get together as we did in the War there can be a renaissance of England. I see a new Elizabethan England, vital, adventurous, high-spirited with a new outcrop of art and literature. We shall have to develop the Empire."

"Labour is giving it away every other morning," said Jaggers.

"We are part of a great Commonwealth with a future of incalculable wealth. There will have to be mass emigration from this overcrowded island and from other good stocks in Europe. There's plenty of room! Here we shall have to grow our own food in large measure. Perhaps we shall be poor, in reduced circumstances as the old ladies used to say, but we may be rich in genius. That's my hope. Better than despair, and within our own hands."

Philip Jaggers looked at his red-headed friend and grinned.

"You're very young, Kit! You can't forget that you were once President of the Oxford Union. That's fatal to a man's career. He always remains an undergraduate. You're living in Cloud Cuckoo Land."

Harington answered his laugh good-humouredly.

"Beyond this present darkness," he said, "I see the light. It signals to us."

Jaggers could not see a gleam of light ahead. He had jeered at Harington for starting a conversation on serious lines. Now he swept all hope aside.

"Your little flowers of hope, my scarlet optimist, are doomed to be blasted in the bud. You, who have been talking of facing realities, have ignored the

greatest reality of all."

"Which?" asked Harington, smiling over at Natalia who was sitting behind the counter with her arms on it, and her little pointed chin resting on her clasped hands. Her black hair was looped over her ears in the Russian style and her dark eyes answered his smile.

Jaggers answered his question by five words.

"Russia. The Third World War."

"No!" said Harington quickly. "That mustn't happen. We must prevent it happening."

"How?" asked Jaggers. "It's all set. The Yanks are turning out atom bombs as hard as they can. Russia, no doubt, is busy with the same toys, meanwhile pushing the frontiers of Communism closer to the Channel ports. Through Albania and Jugoslavia they are already in the Mediterranean. They have their Fifth Columns in every country, including ours. An attack on Greece will be the *casus belli*. Not yet of course. I give it four years."

"I refuse to envisage it!" said Harington.

"Ostrich!" answered Jaggers sardonically.

"It's still possible," said Harington, "to establish a new Balance of Power in Western Europe, ourselves and the United States. Russia will think twice before her leaders challenge that combination of force."

He was startled by a voice from one of the tables.

"Hear, hear!"

It was from one of the young men who belonged to the Imperial College of Science in South Kensington. Harington and Jaggers had clear, somewhat resonant voices. They had been totally unaware that the other people in the restaurant—only four or five tonight—had been listening to their conversation.

Harington turned round sharply and laughed.

"Glad of your support!" he said.

"The atom bomb will also provide a Balance of Power," said the young man from the Imperial College of Science. "Both sides will hesitate to use it. I hope instead that we shall see atomic energy used for peaceful and industrial purposes. We are only three or four years away from that new source of power."

"Pardon me, gentlemen," said Sergei, "I heard the word Russia. Shall I tell

you something about Russia?"

"If you don't take too long about it," said Jaggers, glancing at his wrist-watch.

"Soviet Russia," said Sergei, "has certain religious convictions which are articles of faith in their Communist creed. Karl Marx was their prophet. Lenin reiterated them. Stalin has accepted and repeated them. Molotov holds rigidly to their doctrine. The first article of faith is that there must be an inevitable war between Pluto-democratic Capitalism and World Communism. The First World War prepared the way by weakening the forces of the Capitalist world. The Second World War was the second phase of this inevitable struggle. The Third World War will be the final clash. They are preparing for it."

"Horrid thought!" said Jaggers.

"The English people," said Sergei, "or let me say your Labour Government, believe that if they are reasonable with Russia, Russia will be reasonable with them. They still cling to that belief in spite of what has happened in the United Nations, in spite of Mr. Molotov's No! No! No! They cling to the belief that Russia is suspicious of the Western Powers because of ignorance and misunderstanding, and that if those misunderstandings are removed Russia will co-operate with the Western democracies and kiss Mr. Attlee on both cheeks. That is not so, gentlemen. Mr. Molotov does not misunderstand. The men in the Kremlin do not misunderstand. There are few things they do not know about England's state and political outlook. They hate Social-Democracy. Social democrats are to them Public Enemies Number One. They do not wish to see a prosperous Europe. That is why they oppose the Marshall Plan. They wish to see the Western states of Europe weakened by hunger and poverty and political chaos. Their agents are in Palestine, in Greece, in India, in China—everywhere, gentlemen—stirring up trouble, sowing the seed of Communism. There can be no truce or peace with Soviet Russia."

"I disagree!" said Harington, hotly. "That also is the policy of despair."

The *patron* of the little restaurant put a friendly hand on Harington's shoulder.

"You are a young man, Mr. Harington. In youth there is always hope. That is right."

"Pa," said Natalia from behind the counter, "you're talking too much. It's a good job there's no Ogpu round the corner!"

"It is now the N.K.V.D.," said her father. "But you're right, Natalia. I

permit myself too many words. It's a Russian failing. We talk and talk and talk!"

Somewhat to Harington's embarrassment another of the regular clients had something to say. It was the well-known comedian, Wellington Giles.

"Personally I don't want to go on living until the Third World War. I propose to swallow something before it happens."

At one of the tables sat the little Chinese gentleman. Never before had he given tongue more than enough to order his meal. Now he spoke after a titter of laughter.

"Excuse me! A velly interesting conversation. But you leave out China and the Far East. In China we learn velly many things. Machine-guns. Airplanes. High explosives. There are four hundred million people in China. One day we have something to say. One day London will be a Chinese city. It is written. Excuse me!"

Lady Maggs had paid her bill and smeared her lips with scarlet. She picked up her little bag and rose to leave the restaurant but stopped and smiled at Kit Harington.

"I agreed with every word you said. We're really in a most dreadful situation. It's all the fault of the Labour Government, of course. We must throw them out at the next Election. Queues and coupons! Too annoying!"

She smiled archly at Harington, raised a thin hand in a very dirty glove and went out of the restaurant.

"A general debate!" remarked Jaggers with an uneasy smile. "Time we left, Kit."

That night when Christopher Harington returned to his bed-sitting-room in Belgrave Road, Pimlico, there was a letter for him in a handwriting he knew. His heart gave a lurch. It was from Pamela Faraday.

Dearest Kit [she wrote], *I shall be back from Germany next Thursday. Julian is coming later as he isn't yet demobilized. Shall we lunch somewhere on Friday? I want to talk to you—before going down to Longacre. I will be on the steps of the National Gallery at a quarter to one, in case you care to meet me. My love to you, Kit.*

Pam.

This note gave Harington a touch of torture and, foolishly perhaps, a gleam of hope.

CHAPTER VI

Kit Harington walked up Whitehall to the National Gallery after collecting some letters in the House of Commons. It was a bright springlike morning, with glinting sunlight in the windows of the old Banqueting Hall, which he seldom passed without thinking of Charles who stepped out of one of those windows to the scaffold.

He felt excited at the thought of seeing Pamela again and he allowed himself the hope—a rather desperate hope—that she might have changed her mind about that fellow Julian Inchbold. Otherwise why ask him to meet her? Why want to see him again after breaking his heart? No one in Whitehall would have guessed that Christopher Harington, M.P., was a gentleman with a broken heart. He walked briskly. His blue eyes looked keen and vital. He smiled and raised a finger to his hat when a friend passed him and said, " 'Morning, Harington."

He saw Pamela at the top of the flight of steps outside the Gallery, and he ran up to her and said, "Hullo, Pam!" speaking those two words emotionally with a kind of eagerness and expectation.

She gave him her hand and he raised it to his lips.

"It's nice to see you, Kit," she said, rather shyly. "Thanks for meeting me. Where can we talk?"

"Anywhere," he answered. "Here. In the middle of Trafalgar Square. What about a spot of lunch?"

"A bit early, isn't it?"

"People lunch early nowadays," he told her. "The early bird avoids the queue. I know a decent little place in Soho. Let's take a taxi there."

"Isn't that extravagant? Why not walk?"

"Because I want to kiss you in the taxi. Damn it all, I haven't kissed you for over a year."

"Only one kiss," said Pamela demurely. "I shall be a married woman in a few weeks."

He looked at her with a kind of humorous anguish, if there is such an emotion in human psychology.

“Then why the devil did you ask me to meet you here? What’s your idea of playing cat-and-mouse with me? Blast you, woman! I won’t be a plaything of your feline claws. You’ve broken my heart. Isn’t that enough?”

His voice rang out on the steps of the National Gallery—that resonant voice which had been overheard in the ‘Samovar’. Two girls going into the Gallery turned and tittered. A grey-haired woman with a black handbag blushed as though embarrassed by this emotional declaration by a red-headed young man with very blue eyes.

“Kit!” exclaimed Pamela, with an uneasy laugh. “Don’t make a scene in public.”

“Damn the public!” said Kit, who would not, as a politician, have uttered such words in his own constituency.

“Better have a taxi,” said Pamela, desiring more privacy.

In the taxi she held Harington’s hand and said: “You can give me one chaste kiss, Kit. For friendship’s sake.”

He put an arm round her and drew her close to him and kissed her lips until she pulled back and smiled sideways at him, and said, “Now be good, Kit.”

“I’m not going to be good,” he said, like a naughty boy quarrelling with his nurse. “I’m going to behave like a cave man. I *am* a cave man. That’s why I have red hair. Nobody is going to rob me of my mate.”

“I suppose I’m a cave woman,” said Pamela, “I’ve fallen in love with a very primitive young man, passionately and irresistibly. It’s queer how uncivilized we are under our skins. It makes one rather frightened.”

“Kipling had something to say about it,” answered Harington.

The taxi driver who was listening to this conversation through three inches of open window behind his ear grinned into space. He heard some funny stuff sometimes. His missus wouldn’t believe it.

Harington laughed suddenly as he turned and saw Pamela’s pretty face which he thought more than pretty.

“You’re about as much like a cave woman as the portrait of a lady by Millais or Watts. Aren’t we both talking nonsense?”

“We are,” admitted Pamela. “I wanted you to meet me so that we could talk reasonably like civilized people. I wanted to play fair and not do what I’m going to do in a hole-and-corner way. I like playing straight. I wanted to tell

you all about it, my dear, because I value your friendship and count on your sweetness and loyalty, which I need.”

“You can’t get away with that,” he told her, angrily. “I’ve no sweetness left in me. I’m a soured and bitter man. As for loyalty, where’s yours, lady? You’ve let me down with a crash. We were almost engaged. You knew my love for you. You threw it into the mud like an old glove. Is that loyalty?”

“Kit,” said Pamela, touching his hand again, “I want your friendship now. It’s very precious to me. I want you to stand by me.”

“Gosh!” cried Harington. “This woman thinks she can disarm me by old stuff in the style of Jane Austen and Miss Mitford. She thinks I’m going to behave like a little gentleman—Little Lord Fauntleroy—while she gets away with murder—the murder of my soul. Oh well, here we are.”

The taxi slowed down and slithered up to the kerbstone of a restaurant in Great Compton Street.

“Nice day,” said the taxi driver while Harington felt for half a crown. He wheezed heavily from a touch of bronchitis and then winked at Harington and quoted some familiar words in a husky voice.

“ ‘In the spring a young man’s fancy...’ Ah! I wish I was forty years younger!”

Harington smiled somewhat bitterly at this yearning for youth by one of the ancients, paid his fare, held Pamela’s arm tightly and led her into the restaurant where there were only a few people at the tables.

“Table for two, m’sieu? By the window there. An *apéritif*, m’sieu?”

The *patron* bowed to Pamela, a waiter flicked an imaginary crumb off the snow-white table-cloth.

“Is this all right?” asked Harington.

“Perfect,” said Pamela. “After Berlin it’s impossible to believe that we went through the Blitz. Yesterday I was in Berlin surrounded by ruin and rubble.”

“I wish you had never gone there,” said Harington. “What are we going to eat? *Hors d’œuvres? Croûte? au pot?*”

Harington behaved quite reasonably until the coffee stage of the meal. Two young Frenchmen came to the table next to theirs and handicapped conversation to some extent until they were engaged with their own affairs. Harington answered Pamela’s questions about the political situation in

England which he described as playing skittles on the edge of a yawning gulf.

"Your father is one of the few who dare to tell the truth. He made a great speech in the Lords the other afternoon. It was a plea for a political truce and national unity in a time of peril."

"I heard a bit of it on the wireless," said Pamela. She did not tell him that she listened to it while sitting on the floor between the knees of Julian Inchbold in a block of workmen's flats.

Harington became talkative about the economic situation in England but interrupted himself once to say something quite irrelevant in a low voice.

"You're looking wonderful, Pam. You're more beautiful than when I last saw you."

"Thanks, Kit, it's sweet of you to think so."

Later she accepted a cigarette from him and spoke more freely now that the two Frenchmen had paid up and departed.

"Kit, I'm in a bit of a jam. You know Julian's father is a Labour member?"

"Only too well," answered Christopher, sulkily. "Don't talk to me about him."

"I've come here to talk about him."

"I won't listen."

"Listen, Kit! I'm like Juliet whose parents had a political feud with Romeo's family. Mother is furious with me. She wrote me a letter telling me that I was disgracing my father's name and that if I married the son of a Labour man she would never speak to me again. She denounces the Labour Government as though it were filled with devils. You know her violence of expression."

"I do!" answered Harington with a short laugh. "She's the last representative of those strong-minded ladies who thought Gladstone was a wicked old villain and dear Disraeli the only true patriot."

"That was before Mother's time," said Pamela with a smile. "She's not as old as all that!"

"She carries on the tradition," said Harington. "But I agree with her hostility to your intending *mésalliance* with that young swine who has been making love to you, damn his impertinence."

"You would like him," said Pamela. "And the amusing thing is that he

hates the Labour Government almost as much as Mother. He says they're a bunch of crooks."

"Oh," said Harington, dryly. "That's because he thinks that will go down well with the daughter of Lord Bramley. Although I'm on the other side I have a certain respect for some of the Labour men. They're doing their best—after frightful mistakes—in a time of extreme crisis. I want to be fair to them."

Pamela raised her eyebrows and laughed.

"You talk like Daddy. He makes Mother furious. I think you must be the only two people in England who are fair-minded."

Harington laughed.

"A very charming speech, but dead wrong. The people of this stricken island hate the extremes and all the party slogans and all the insincerity of the sham fight. They would like to see a middle-of-the-road Government. If the Liberals had any big leader they could sweep the country at the next election."

He broke off and laughed again.

"Why are you and I talking politics? I didn't come here to make an election address. I came here to have it out with you about that young blackguard who has been making love to you."

"Kit," said Pamela, "I'm going to marry him. Please keep a civil tongue in your head for my future husband."

Harington's fair skin flushed hotly almost to the colour of his hair.

"I'm sorry," he said in a low voice. "I suppose I'm behaving like a cad. It's because I love you so much. It's because I want you so much. You and I, Pam, belong to each other. Fate meant us for each other. Won't you chuck that fellow? Won't you come to me?"

"I can't," she said. "Julian has swept me off my feet. I can't resist him."

She spoke those words as though she were being carried away by some predetermined force against which she was powerless to struggle.

Harington gave a groan of anguish which startled some of the people in the restaurant who glanced in his direction.

"Not, I hope, a case of ptomaine poisoning," said a young man in an audible murmur to a young woman at a nearby table.

"Bill, please," said Harington, snapping his fingers at the waiter.

He lowered his voice and spoke again to Pamela.

“One day you will come to me and I shall be waiting. But it won’t be the same as if you came now.”

“Oh, Kit,” said Pamela, tremulously, “I wish I could!”

There was a mist of tears in her eyes.

“Why not? For God’s sake, Pam, my beloved——”

“I can’t... I can’t.... I’m in love with Julian.”

“Then it’s no use talking,” said Harington.

His fair skin went very pale. His mouth hardened. He was suffering abominably, but he was angry.

“Let’s pay and get out of this disgusting place. I’ll get another taxi. Where shall I drop you?”

“Not in the Thames!” she answered, with a nervous laugh.

She let him kiss her again before he left the taxi at the entrance to Palace Yard. She was driving on to Kensington.

“Wish me luck!” she whispered. “Be generous and forgiving, Kit, my dear.”

“You’ve broken my heart,” he told her. “I’m a tortured man.”

The policeman at the gate saluted Christopher Harington, M.P.

CHAPTER VII

Pamela came out of Ashleigh station on the afternoon following her meeting with Kit. After dumping her bag by the kerbstone she raised a finger at the driver of a small car. This happened to be Dick Barnes, late of the R.A.F. (ground staff) and now helping his father to run a garage in the village of Church Hampden, six miles away.

He touched his cap and grinned. He knew this girl. Before the War he had taught her to drive a car at great risk to his life because she let it rip, all out, along the winding lanes.

“Good afternoon, Dick,” she said, as he went forward to pick up her bag.

“Nice to see you again, miss,” he answered, taking off his glove to shake hands with her.

“Nice to be back,” she said. “Better than Berlin!”

“I don’t doubt it, miss. All starving, aren’t they?”

“Badly undernourished. In a terrible state.... Put that bag on the back seat. I’ll sit in front.”

Presently, after they had driven a mile, she gave an exclamation.

“How marvellous!”

“Marvellous?” asked Dick Barnes. He couldn’t see anything marvellous ahead of him. He could only see the same old leafless trees and the soggy fields. He knew every pothole in the road.

“To be in England again!” she explained. “After the ruins of Berlin. And it’s like a spring day with that glinting sunshine and that blue in the sky.”

“Lots of rain and more coming,” said Dick Barnes.

After the next bend in the road Pamela spoke again.

“How are things in Church Hampden?”

Dick considered his answer. He wasn’t one of those glib know-alls who spoke without thought.

“Not what you might call good,” he said, after that pause, and he gave a laugh in which there was a note of bitterness. “Filthy food and not enough of

it. Nothing in the shops. No houses for ex-Servicemen. Not enough beer. Damn' little petrol. No prospect of better times, as far as I can see."

Pamela laughed at this black picture of England.

"People in German cities are living in cellars."

"I'm living with my mother-in-law," said Dick Barnes, darkly. "Worse than a cellar on your own."

Pamela was amused by this old mother-in-law joke, which was no joke, it seemed, to Dick Barnes.

"A bit difficult, eh?"

"You've said it, miss."

He passed a Green Line 'bus, avoided two boys on bicycles and then spoke again.

"I voted Labour last time. Now I wish I hadn't. They've made a mess of it, as one must admit. No coal last winter and cuts in electricity during the worst spell. My little woman and I nearly froze to death. Now it's everything for export and to hell with the home market. Cutting off the basic petrol has ruined a lot of little garages and a lot of road-houses into which ex-Servicemen put their money. Makes no blighted sense to me, if you'll pardon the word."

"That's all right," said Pamela.

"More austerities to come," said Dick Barnes in a voice of doom. "That's according to Sir Stafford Cripps who wallows in austerity. Sir Stafford Creeps I call him! It makes one's blood go cold when one hears him on the wireless."

Pamela smiled at this narrative of woe. Anything was better than Berlin.

"Have you seen my father lately?" she asked as though Dick Barnes might have dined recently with her noble parent.

"Round the village," he told her. "Looking pretty bobbish. His lordship comes into the 'Green Dragon' now and then and has a drink with the chaps standing around. Of course, they play up to the Old Man—I mean his lordship. You wouldn't think that any of 'em voted Labour in the last Election. It makes me laugh! Then he's always talking to the village kids, the little devils! Gives his sweet ration to them. He'd do better to wallop them. Always up to mischief."

He drove his car through open iron gates into a drive bordered by rhododendrons and tall poplars leading to a square-built Georgian house. Pamela had been born in it.

The door was opened by a white-headed old man in a black suit who received an affectionate greeting from Pamela.

"Hullo, Meggs, old dear! Anybody at home?"

The old man raised his hands in astonishment.

"Good gracious, Miss Pamela! Why didn't you let us know the time of your train? We would have sent the car for you. His lordship is still allowed a drop of petrol."

"That's all right, Meggs. How are your old bones keeping? How's the rheumatics?"

"Not too bad, miss, considering these horseterities, and economy in fuel. Now there's a shortage of potatoes. Oh dear, oh dear!"

He coughed behind a transparent hand and then spoke again more cheerfully.

"It's very pleasant to see you again, Miss Pamela, I must say, my dear. You're looking bonny."

"Is Father in?" asked Pamela going into the hall.

The old man coughed again and lowered his voice.

"The situation is a little difficult at the moment. The Bishop of Ashleigh has been waiting some time, but his lordship is in the study playing with Mrs. Bosanquet's children. When I last ventured to look in he was pretending to be a tiger in the jungle. I'm sorry to say he told me to go to the devil."

Pamela laughed at this statement of affairs.

"Just like Father. I'll see what I can do about it."

She went to her father's study and opened the door. Lord Bramley, who had once helped to govern a great Empire now in dissolution, was crawling stealthily from beneath an oak table towards some long velvet window curtains behind which three small children were hiding with squeals of laughter at the sound of a tiger's roar.

"Father," said Pamela, smiling at this scene, "the Bishop of Ashleigh is waiting to see you. Hadn't you better go?"

"Oh, blast the Bishop!" said Lord Bramley, irritably. But he rose to his feet clutching his daughter's arm to steady himself. He looked remarkably like the caricatures of him in the papers, with a shock of white hair and a lean actor-looking face with a humorous mouth.

“Tiger! Tiger!” shouted the three children.

“No more tigers, my dears,” said Lord Bramley. “People *will* interrupt our games just as they’re getting exciting. You must all go now.”

Two small girls and a boy came from behind the curtains reluctantly.

“May we come tomorrow?” asked the small boy. “Will you play tigers again?”

“Not tomorrow, young man. I have to go to London to make a speech in the House of Lords.”

“Will it be in the Children’s Hour?” asked one of the little girls.

Lord Bramley’s humorous mouth twisted to a smile and there was a flash of mirth under his shaggy eyebrows.

“Just the place for it!” he said.

When the children had gone he turned to his daughter and put his arm round her when she kissed his cheek.

“We had your wire, my dear. So you’ve abandoned that unpleasant job?”

“Yes, Father. I’ve got my release.”

“You’re well out of it,” said Lord Bramley. “We can’t put Germany on her feet again for a long time yet though it’s costing the British tax-payer something like eighty millions a year.”

He held Pamela at arm’s length and his keen eyes searched her face. Then he laughed.

“You’re in for the deuce of a row, young woman. Your mother thinks you’re about to disgrace the family name. I’m not sure that she isn’t right.”

Pamela laughed uneasily.

“I know I’ve got to face the music, Father. But meanwhile the Bishop is waiting for you. Poor Bishop!”

“Oh lord, yes! I’ll have to ask him to dinner, I suppose. Perhaps I *have* asked him to dinner. See you later, Pam.”

He went out of the room, leaving the door open, his voice ringing out—that resonant voice which Pamela had heard in the House of Lords before the War and many times on the wireless.

“A thousand apologies, my dear Bishop. I was up to my neck in official documents. I have to give tongue in the House of Lords tomorrow. You’ll stay

to dinner, of course?"

The drawing-room door closed on further conversation.

CHAPTER VIII

PAMELA looked round her father's study for a moment with smiling eyes. She had not been in this room since going to Germany, which seemed a lifetime ago because of all that had happened. She had changed since then. Her love for Julian had changed her, revealing a passion she had never known until then, and was frightened almost to find it in her own nature.

As a child she had been warned off this room by nurses and governesses. She had been hushed down if she made a noise too near the door. Her father was always working in there with Very Important People—silly old people she had thought them when she had peeped through the banisters from the landing which led to her nursery. Some of them had bald heads which shone under the candelabra in the hall. Some of them had white beards like Rumpelstiltskin in her fairy-tale book. There were loud-voiced gentlemen who called her father 'Bramley' or 'Old Man' though he wasn't very old, she thought. But some of them called him 'my lord' as Meggs and the other servants did. Inside this room they sat talking, talking, talking, and she used to wonder what they found to talk about, for such a long time. "Politics, my dear," said Nurse Fanny. Pam imagined 'Politics' to be something very unpleasant like arithmetic or spelling, but even more beastly.

It was Politics which prevented her father from telling her stories at bedtime which he always did if he could—wonderful stories of foreign lands, and princesses, and knights, and treasure islands, always with something funny in them which made her laugh. He acted all the parts in different voices and made them come to life. He didn't mind her coming into his study whoever was there unless he was in a bad temper with his visitors. Several times she had slipped out of her bed and crept downstairs—the candelabra made little dancing colours on the walls—and tapped at her father's door before opening it and going in. Always he had called out: "Hullo, Pam! Time you were asleep, young woman."

"I want you to tell me a story, Daddy."

"Not tonight, old girl. Better go back to bed before you catch your death of cold. I'll ring for Nanny."

But sometimes he introduced her to his visitors. She remembered one of them who took her on his knees and said, "I'll tell you a story, little lady." It

was a Welsh fairy story with an old witch in it. It was a very good story and the old gentleman's name was Lloyd George.

Pamela saw the ghost of herself in this room, the ghost of the little girl in pyjamas asking for a story. On the wall by the fireplace was a crayon drawing of her by Orpen. He had drawn her in pyjamas curled up in the big chair over there with wide-open eyes as though listening to an exciting story by her father. She glanced sideways into the mirror over the mantelpiece and saw herself as a grown-up woman and gave a little sigh as she looked into her own eyes. She had had some strange adventures during the past few years. The strangest one was waiting for her.

She turned away from the mirror quickly at the sound of footsteps outside the door. A young man came in with a worried look and a sheaf of papers. He was a pale young man with black hair, rather delicate looking. It was her father's private secretary, Robin Melville, who had succeeded the long-suffering Mr. Skinner, now pensioned off. He looked startled at the sight of her.

"Oh, I'm sorry! I thought the room was empty."

"How do you do?" asked Pamela, holding out her hand. She had met him a few times before going to Germany. "How are you bearing up under Father's irascibility?"

He laughed rather nervously.

"I'm afraid I get on his nerves, sometimes, especially when I mis-spell words like 'irascibility'! I'm not very good at spelling. Still, there's always Webster which I keep close at hand."

"I expect he's working you to death," said Pamela.

Robin Melville laughed again, not quite at his ease in the presence of Pamela.

"He has the constitution of a lion and insists on working late at night. I'm afraid the younger generation can't keep pace with that kind of thing. We haven't the same stamina. Perhaps we didn't get properly fed at school in the First World War."

"Well, don't let him wear you out," said Pamela. "See you later, I hope."

She raised a hand with a friendly salute to a shy young man and left the room. She walked upstairs with a sinking feeling in the pit of the stomach, as they say. In a few moments she would have to face her mother. She felt like King Edward VII when, as Prince of Wales, he was summoned to the presence

of Queen Victoria.

She tapped at her mother’s door, and heard her mother’s voice call out, “Come!”

Pamela moistened her lips with the tip of her tongue, opened the door and went in.

Lady Bramley was sitting at a big deal table on which was a pile of socks. She had just poked her finger through a big hole in one of them. By her side, sewing up the holes in a sheet, was Henriette, the little French wife of Pamela’s brother Nigel who had been crippled rather badly after many raids over Berlin in the R.A.F. With her curly dark hair and her dimpled face and black liquid eyes swept by long lashes, she looked like a portrait by Vigée le Brun, or one of Lely’s little ladies of the Stuart Court.

“Hullo, Mother!” cried Pamela with forced cheerfulness. “Hullo, Henriette!”

“Aren’t you rather late?” asked Lady Bramley coldly.

“No, the train was punctual, Mother. I took a taxi from the station.”

She went round the table and kissed her mother’s cheek. It was like kissing a marble mantelpiece, so cold and unresponsive.

“Pam!” cried Henriette, greatly excited. “*Quelle joie de te revoir.*”

“That will do, Henriette,” said Lady Bramley. “We all understand French but we prefer to speak English.”

“French is more beautiful,” said Henriette, with a little sulky pout. “French is more expressive.”

“You two look very busy,” said Pamela. “Are those Father’s socks? They look as though they ought to be thrown away. My word, what a hole!”

She put a finger into one of those holes and wraggled it. But she was not feeling humorous. By the expression on her mother’s face, by this maternal coldness, she knew that a storm was brewing. It would break over her head presently. There would be forked lightning.

“Thrown away?” exclaimed Lady Bramley. “Don’t you know that the Labour Government threatens to reduce the clothing ration still more? In any case we’re all in rags and tatters. Your father’s underclothing is a disgrace. So is mine. I’m like one of those wretched old women who used to sleep on the Embankment, tied up with bits of string. That’s what Labour has brought us to after a victorious war. Rags and tatters! National bankruptcy, while they whine

like beggars for American aid. I would willingly strangle the whole crowd of them with my own hands."

Pamela laughed uneasily. Her future father-in-law was a Labour Member of Parliament. He would be included in her mother's list of those to be strangled.

"Some of them are tough old chickens, Mother. Hard to wring their necks!"

"I'd like to see them hanging on the lamp-posts in Whitehall with their tongues hanging out!" said Lady Bramley, ignoring this little jest.

"Mother!" cried Pamela. "You're always so violent in your way of putting things. You don't really mean what you say."

"Every word of it!" answered her mother with a stab of her needle through an old sock. "Those men are betraying their country. They keep on handing away the British Empire. Now they're breaking up the British Navy for scrap iron at a time when Russia is threatening a new war. They want to abolish the House of Lords. They're reducing this country to a fifth-class Power, and presently we shall all be starving to death."

"It is very true!" said Henriette. "But it is worse in France. Only General de Gaulle can save my poor France from the horrors of Communism."

"After Germany England seems wonderful," said Pamela. "Everybody looks happy and well fed."

It was an incautious remark which irritated her mother.

"Don't talk to me like that, child," she said, angrily. "I dare say in Germany you were living on the fat of the land at the tax-payers' expense. Ask Henriette if she is happy and well fed. Ask old Meggs. Ask anyone in Church Hampden."

"I am not happy and I am not well fed," cried Henriette. "English food is terrible. It is always shepherd's pie or stewed rabbit. Life in England is not amusing. Socks, rags, rain, fog, boiled fish or stewed rabbit! It is perhaps less amusing in France, though there is always the Black Market for those who can afford it. That is a better system for those who can afford it. In England everything is reduced to the same level of misery. I find that very annoying. *Très démoralisant!*"

"I decline to be demoralized," said Lady Bramley firmly. "I am only filled with suppressed rage and high blood pressure. We must push out that dreadful Labour Party or the nation will perish. I hope you agree, Pam. I hope your

experiences in Germany have not weakened your loyalties—your loyalties to your father and your country.”

She looked at her daughter with searching and challenging eyes. It was getting very near to the danger point which Pamela wished to avoid.

“My dear Mother,” she cried, “don’t look at me as though I were about to commit high treason. I haven’t gone either Labour or Communist.”

“I’m glad to hear it,” said Lady Bramley, grimly, “I’m very glad to hear it.”

Pam changed the subject hurriedly. Now was not the time to talk about Julian or family loyalties.

“How’s Nigel?” she asked Henriette.

Henriette gave a little sigh.

“He works always at his weaving, poor boy. It amuses him. He is in his work-room upstairs.”

“I’ll go and see him,” said Pamela. “By the way, Mother, the Bishop of Ashleigh is downstairs. Father has asked him to dinner.”

“Drat the man!” cried Lady Bramley in a voice of anguish. “Your father has no sense in his head. He asks everybody to dinner when there’s no food in the larder.”

“Perhaps bishops don’t want much to eat,” suggested Pamela, glad that the conversation had switched to a less dangerous topic.

Lady Bramley laughed bitterly.

“That’s where you make a mistake, child. As the daughter of a Canon of Westminster I know all about bishops. They have excellent appetites. I must go and talk to Meggs.”

“I’ll go and see Nigel,” said Pamela. She slipped out of the room and drew a deep breath. So far so good! Julian’s name had not been mentioned but it was only a reprieve. She would have to have it out with her mother. She would need all her courage.

CHAPTER IX

Her brother Nigel was in his work-room upstairs. Before opening the door Pamela heard the noise of a shuttle clicking fast and furiously. He had taken up weaving, as she knew by his letters, and was very keen on it. He was sitting in front of his loom working with such concentration that he did not hear her come in. A lock of fair hair fell over his forehead and he had a pipe between his teeth. He was older than Pamela but looked very boyish in a blue cotton shirt open at the neck, and corduroy trousers. Sitting there no one would have guessed that he was badly crippled unless their eyes had wandered to a pair of crutches lying on the bare boards at his side.

"Hullo, Nigel!" said Pamela.

He looked up at her, took the pipe from his lips and held out his left hand.

"Hullo, Pam! It's good to see you."

She put her arms round him and kissed his cheek.

"Nigel darling! How are you?"

"Fine!" he told her. "I can hop around pretty well now and the pain-devils have been in full retreat lately."

"Thank heaven for that! How's the weaving?"

Nigel Faraday smiled at his work.

"I'm becoming an expert, and I get a good market for the stuff. As much as I can make. It's an excellent anodyne and stops one thinking very effectively...."

"Don't you want to think?" asked Pamela, laughing at him.

Her brother shrugged his shoulders.

"What's the good? The world is in an awful state and one can't do a darned thing about it. Things are boiling up for a nice new war with a competition in atom bombs. Better go on weaving as long as possible—though I must say it's hard on Henriette."

"Why hard on her?"

Nigel laughed good-humouredly.

"She can't bear the click of the shuttle. It nearly drives her mad. She wants to scream. The other day she did scream and had a fit of hysterics, poor darling."

"That's very foolish of her," said Pamela, with no sympathy for Henriette.

Nigel shook his head and then sighed.

"I'm sorry for her, poor kid. Hard luck marrying me just before my crash."

"It ought to make her love you more," said Pamela.

"She's bored." Nigel gave a laughing groan. "It's a poor life for her. All our neighbours are old birds, and she finds them very stuffy, as, by the lord, they are! Now that the petrol ration is cut off she says she might as well be in a concentration camp. I don't blame her. It's a pity she doesn't take up a hobby like painting or music."

"Doesn't she play the piano?" asked Pamela.

Nigel nodded and began to refill his pipe.

"Rather well. Very good at Chopin, but lately she's taken a dislike to it. She reads endless detective novels."

"Oh well, it will be better when the summer comes," said Pamela. "The long pull of an English winter is always pretty trying."

Nigel agreed and then looked at Pamela with searching and humorous eyes.

"How about yourself, Pam? What's all this about marrying the son of a Labour member?"

"Quite true," said Pamela with a slightly heightened colour. "In a few weeks when he's demobilized."

"There's going to be a row about it," he warned her with a grin.

Pamela had no need of such a warning.

"I know! Mother is boiling up for it—I hope you'll be on my side, Nigel."

"It depends," he answered cautiously. "What sort of a bloke is he?"

"Frightfully beautiful!"

Nigel was amused by this astonishing adjective to the word 'beautiful'.

"Sure of him?" he asked after a laugh.

Pamela paused before her next answer.

"Marriage is always a risk, isn't it? I happen to love him."

Nigel grinned at her again. "Oh well, if you think that, there's no more argument about it."

"I know I love him," she assured him with a nervous little laugh. "That's to say he has a personal attraction which knocks me edgewise."

"Highly dangerous, old girl!" exclaimed her brother. "Passion wears out. Physical attraction doesn't last. Then there may be the devil to pay. I speak as one of the ancients. I speak as an early-Victorian father."

He laughed and looked quizzically at her.

"Have you met your bloke's people yet?"

"Not yet," admitted Pamela. "I haven't had time."

She didn't tell him that Julian seemed scared of her meeting his father and mother, or at least didn't encourage a visit before he could get home.

Nigel spoke not as a Victorian father but as an elder brother.

"It's as well to inspect one's parents-in-law. They can make themselves an awful nuisance. Fortunately the Channel divides me from Henriette's numerous uncles and aunts and cousins who are all de Gaullists, I believe, and must be quite intolerable, especially *en masse*, as French relatives have the habit of being on birthdays and anniversaries."

"Thank goodness I'm not a snob," said Pamela. "As long as Julian's people are nice and kind I don't mind what they are. Haven't we got rid of caste and all that nonsense? In any case Julian's father is a distinguished Member of Parliament. What's wrong with that?"

Nigel seemed amused by this question.

"Only that he's on the wrong side from Mother's point of view. It's also a bit awkward for our honoured father. I can see the headings in the morning papers. 'Lord Bramley's daughter marries Labour member's son.' 'Political Romance!' "

"Nigel," cried Pamela, "are you going to take sides against me? I thought I could count on you."

For a moment her eyes became wet and she looked distressed.

"I'm all on the side of happiness," answered Nigel. "If Julian—isn't that his name?—is likely to make you happy, go to it with my blessing. Grab what happiness you can, old dear. Life is going to be very short anyhow. We're all

going to be atomized."

"Oh, Nigel," exclaimed Pamela with a look of horror, "don't say terrible things like that!"

"They're terrible possibilities," he answered. "One has only to read the headlines in the daily gloom-sheets. That's why I go on weaving. It's a kind of dope. One doesn't think while one works out a pattern."

After a while further conversation was prevented by the banging of a gong in the hall.

"Dinner already?" exclaimed Nigel. "Well, I'll have to wash and change, I suppose."

"Can I help you down, darling?"

"Not on your life," he told her. "I'm as active as a hedge-sparrow on those two sticks. I've learnt the technique. At first it was more dangerous than ski-ing."

He exhibited his technique by taking two stairs at a time on the way down.

CHAPTER X

It was characteristic of Lord Bramley that he should have invited another man to dinner in addition to the Bishop without informing her ladyship, and completely forgetful of the fact. All his married life he had been in the habit of giving open hospitality to his friends—‘drop in to dinner, my dear fellow’... or, ‘you’ll stay to dinner, of course’—confident in his simple faith that dinner would be provided by a well-trained staff according to the established order of things. It was difficult to break a life-long habit like that now that income tax was annihilating his class, now that there was no well-trained staff, and now that food was rationed on a low scale, getting lower.

Pamela saw a look of consternation on her mother’s face when a totally unexpected guest arrived in the drawing-room where the Bishop was chatting brightly. The newcomer was Gerald Jerningham, the well-known economist and editor. He was a youngish man with the appearance of a sick vulture, so Pamela thought, except that vultures do not wear horn-rimmed glasses.

“So kind of you to invite me to dinner, Lady Bramley,” he said, advancing with smiling self-confidence.

Lady Bramley gave a dry little laugh and answered with her usual devastating bluntness of speech, which in the past had appalled Indian Rajahs, and delighted A.D.C.s and the junior members of her husband’s staff.

“My husband may have invited you to dinner but I assure you that I had nothing to do with it and that you will get nothing to eat.”

Gerald Jerningham looked rather startled but pulled himself together remarkably well.

“How very amusing!” he said with a kind of croaking laugh. “It will be a pleasure to starve in your company, dear lady. It will also be a good training for the leaner days to come according to our present economic position and future prospects.”

“A gloomy prophecy, Jerningham,” said the Bishop of Ashleigh, putting the tips of his fingers together as though in prayer. He was a perky little man, sparrow-like, with very thin legs in black gaiters under a silk apron. He had merry eyes which twinkled at Pamela now and then.

“Dinner is served, my lady,” said old Meggs coming to the door.

It was then that the Bishop's eyes twinkled at Pamela.

He quoted a line from the wisdom of Solomon. " 'Better a dinner of herbs where love is than a stalled ox and hatred withal.' "

Henriette had appeared with Nigel. Robin Melville, the private secretary, came in with his worried look and shook hands deferentially with the Bishop. Lord Bramley arrived at the dinner-table two minutes late, with his tie still awry after his performance as a tiger in his study.

"Sorry I had no time to change," he said cheerily. "Hullo, Jerningham, glad to see you. Anything to eat?"

"More than you deserve," answered his wife rather grimly.

Lord Bramley smiled at her and raised his eyebrows. "I deserve quite a lot, my dear. I'm a hard-working man. Anyhow, this soup smells good. I suspect rabbit."

"Delicious!" was the considered opinion of the Bishop.

"Out of a tin," said Lady Bramley. "Strange as it may seem, one may still get it without points. Our wonderful Minister of Food overlooked the fact."

"Really?" exclaimed the Bishop. "I must tell my wife. It's very well worth knowing."

"My wife is the terror of the local stores," said Lord Bramley. "They tremble when she advances upon them. They produce things from beneath the counter. I suspect she does a little bit on the Black Market."

"Aren't you talking the greatest nonsense, Frank?" asked Lady Bramley icily.

"Very likely," answered his lordship. "I often do, especially in the House of Lords."

Pamela glanced at Henriette presently and saw her make a grimace of disgust when something was pushed through the hatch between the dining-room and the kitchen.

"Shepherd's pie again!" she said in a low voice to Nigel. "*Ciel!*"

Nigel grinned at her across the table.

"Very nourishing," he said.

"Shepherd's pie, Bishop?" asked Lady Bramley, when that dish was placed before her by old Meggs. "There's nothing else if you don't like it."

“Idyllic!” said the Bishop. “Herrick would have written a poem about it.”

“Lordy, lordy!” exclaimed Lord Bramley with half a groan and half a laugh. “I could do with a nice juicy steak. Shall we ever see one again?”

“Not while the Labour Government is in power,” said Lady Bramley.

The Bishop smiled at his hostess and then spoke, according to his cloth and office but without undue gravity.

“We used to take the Lord’s Prayer for granted. ‘Give us this day our daily bread.’ Now it has a very real meaning to us even at tables like this. Well, thank God we still get enough, or almost enough.”

Gerald Jerningham, the economist, gave a sepulchral laugh on the left hand of his hostess.

“For how long?” he asked. “There’s a world shortage of grain. In any case we shan’t be able to buy American and Canadian wheat unless we can bridge the dollar gap, and that’s giving the Government a sick headache. We’re nowhere near it yet. Don’t you agree, sir?”

He addressed himself to his host with the deference of a youngish man to an Elder Statesman.

Lord Bramley gave a smiling grunt.

“My dear fellow, you know far more about those things than I do. I have to mug them up from your leading articles. Have some beer.”

Pamela lost touch for a while with the conversation. Her mind had crossed the North Sea to Germany. She wondered what Julian was doing at this time. Probably he was dining in one of those underground restaurants to which he had taken her from time to time. Around him would be the ruins of Berlin, and in the darkness German girls accosting British soldiers—boys of nineteen—pretty German girls selling themselves for the price of a meal, fainting for food, some of them. She had seen the desperate look in the eyes of young mothers whose children were wailing for food which wasn’t there. They would be glad of this shepherd’s pie with its minced meat and potatoes.

“A penny for your thoughts, Pam,” said Nigel across the table.

“Not worth it,” she told him.

She turned to Robin Melville sitting next to her.

“Does my tyrannical father give you any free time?”

Melville answered with a shy laugh.

“Oh, plenty—at irregular hours.”

“And what do you do with it? Have you a hobby?”

It was Henriette who answered.

“He writes poetry! *Merveilleuse!* He paints in water colours. *Beaucoup de talent.*”

“Oh no!” exclaimed Melville, flushing hotly and laughing in his nervous way.

“*Mais oui. Sans blague.*”

Nigel smiled at his little French wife with raised eyebrows.

“He lets you read his poems? I call that very friendly of him!”

“I persuaded him,” said Henriette. “I coerced him. He was very shy about it.”

“It was an indiscretion,” said Melville hastily. “Fellows who write poetry—what they believe to be poetry—ought to keep it secret.”

“In some cases,” said Nigel, grinning at him. “I wish some of these modern poets would be more reticent instead of publishing their tripe—which nobody can understand.”

“But supposing it is great genius, *mon bien-aimé*? Supposing there is a new Shelley or a new Lord Byron? Should they hide their poems? Should they be ashamed of them?”

Pamela’s attention was diverted from this argument by conversation on her father’s side of the table.

Gerald Jerningham was laying down the law.

“This Government is concentrating on the wrong things. All this export drive and the starving of the home market is a gamble which mayn’t come off. What assurance have we that our manufactured goods are going to find markets? Some of them are already shutting us out because of inflated prices due to high wages.”

“What’s the alternative?” asked Lord Bramley. “You’re the fellow who knows, Jerningham!”

He spoke with a touch of irony and his humorous mouth twisted to a smile.

“Nothing matters but coal,” said Jerningham. “That and, in second place, textiles. France, Sweden, Denmark, Holland, Belgium are all screaming for

coal. We have it under our feet. Before the War we exported forty-six million tons a year. Now we're sending only a small insignificant dribble abroad. Let's raise the coal, let's sell it, and most of our economic troubles would be solved."

"Not so easy," said Lord Bramley. "Difficult to get enough men. Old-fashioned machinery in the mines. Still, we're doing better. The figures are going up. The miners are getting it into their heads at last that the fate of the nation depends upon their doing a good day's work. I give 'em full marks."

He was interrupted by his wife.

"I don't agree. The whole system is wrong, Frank, and you know it. What incentive have they to work when the laziest man gets as much as the hardest worker? That's Socialism. These Labour Ministers, these snarling, frightened men—if the Bishop weren't here I should use some very strong language."

The Bishop smiled with his bright merry eyes and raised his thin hands.

"Don't let my presence inhibit you, ma'am! Having served in the First World War I am not easily shocked by strong language. But I venture to suggest, in great humility, that a little Christian charity is not out of place even in the political arena. Even when we criticize our present leaders. I pray for His Majesty's Government, whatever it may be."

"Fudge!" answered Lady Bramley. "How can you apply Christian charity to the agents of the Devil?"

The Bishop of Ashleigh laughed good-naturedly.

"A very difficult theological argument," he admitted.

Lord Bramley turned to his wife and smiled under his white shaggy eyebrows.

"My dear Rose," he said, "you're a very intolerant woman. I think I may have remarked on that before during our thirty years of married life."

"And I've never admitted it," answered Lady Bramley. "Thank God I'm not a widdy-waddy."

She rose from the table and his lordship the Bishop hurried to open the door for her and the two girls who followed her.

"Have some brandy, Bishop," said Lord Bramley. "It's the real old stuff and almost the last of it. Jerningham, help yourself. Now we can talk reasonably, and without fanaticism."

They talked about the coming debate in the House of Lords on the

Government's veto bill restricting the right of delay.

"We shall fight," said his lordship.

"A very great danger of a single chamber Government," said the Bishop.

They talked about Russia.

"Those fellows don't want to co-operate," said Lord Bramley. "They don't want a prosperous Europe. They hate the Marshall Plan."

"They're frightened men," said the Bishop. "They're afraid of the Americans and the atom bomb."

"Why are they so damned aggressive then?" asked Lord Bramley. "If they're frightened, why do they keep on twisting the lion's tail?"

Gerald Jerningham had something to say—quite a lot to say—about the Russian economic system.

Robert Melville, private secretary, sat silent, then he gave a deeply drawn sigh. Perhaps he was thinking out a new line of verse.

Presently the Bishop of Ashleigh raised both his hands and let them drop with a gesture of despair.

"Everywhere I go I hear talk about the possibility of a Third World War. I hear it over tea-tables. I hear it from pretty lips. I hear it from old fogeys and young mothers. It horrifies me. The very thought of it fills me with terror. It would be the end of all things."

"I hope I shall be dead before it happens," said Lord Bramley.

He thrust all his fingers through his shock of white hair and said: "Oh, God! Oh, God! The folly of man! The wickedness of man! Bishop, you haven't done your job. Where is Christianity?"

Then suddenly he laughed.

"An atomic war doesn't bear thinking about. It mustn't happen. Have some more brandy, Bishop. Jerningham, you're bursting to be eloquent. Get it off your chest, man, though I don't promise to listen. Damn it, I have listened to too many speeches in the House of Lords."

CHAPTER XI

Two days passed before Pamela had to go through the hoop, as Nigel called it. Her mother, who was President of the local Women's Institute, was very busy arranging a sale of work and was round at the village hall a good deal. At meal-times she refrained from any reference to Pamela's private affairs.

The weather was wet and stormy but very mild, with a promise of spring. Birds were chirruping in the hedges. A squirrel searched for buried chestnuts among the fallen leaves of a tree on the front lawn. There were bright gleams of sunshine between the rainstorms. Putting on an old raincoat, Pamela faced the south-west gale in tramps over the heath and liked the feel of the rain on her face and was glad to be in England after so long an exile. Henriette declined to come with her, being hostile to pedestrian exercise and the English climate, but Pamela did not crave for her companionship, being busy with her own thoughts—thoughts about Julian and her coming marriage—the most tremendous adventure of a woman's life. Julian would have to get a job when he was demobbed. It might not be easy for him. They would be poverty-stricken, she expected. A tiny flat somewhere, or a bed-sitting-room, would be all they could hope for until Julian made good. Perhaps her father would help them out a bit, but she wouldn't sponge on him. He had enough to do with his dwindling capital.

She sat a good deal with Nigel while he was weaving and when Henriette was downstairs reading her detective novels, for which she made special journeys by bus to Ashleigh. It was restful sitting with Nigel while he was weaving. No conversation was necessary or even possible because of the click of the shuttle. But every now and then he would knock off for a few minutes to light his pipe or pass a few words. Now and then they talked together for half an hour or so about their different experiences during the War, about Germany, about that day's news in the papers.... The Foreign Secretary had come out fairly and squarely for a Western Union.... Women journalists had heckled a Cabinet Minister over the clothing ration.... Their father's speech in the House of Lords had been reported very fully in *The Times*. He seemed to have given the Labour Government pause.... France had devalued the franc.

"Nigel," said Pamela, during one of these pauses between the click of the shuttle, "what's the meaning of it all?"

"All what?" he asked, pressing down a new wad of tobacco into his pipe.

"Life," she answered. "What's happening in the world now? All this dark mystery."

Nigel's lips twisted to a smile and she noticed that he was getting more like their father, with the same mouth and the same actor look, though more delicately and finely cut.

"Rather difficult questions," he remarked. "Do you think I know the answers?"

"How do you feel about it all? Have you any glimmerings of light?"

"Not the gleam of a half-inch of candle," he answered. "Darkness gathers round us, old girl."

He touched his weaving and disentangled some threads.

"The fact is, Pam," he said, after a long pause, "our generation has lost its way and we have no leaders and no light. Ahead of us is the frightful menace of an atomic war. Behind us are the memories of the Second World War which was utterly ruthless on both sides, though we didn't descend to the sadism of the enemy and kept our sense of decency fairly well. It was our heroic time as a people. I'm not underestimating that, but as one of the raiders over Germany I don't look back with pride and pleasure to my bombing activities. It was just black murder, though I didn't think so at the time."

"We had to defeat the Germans," said Pamela. "Now I'm sorry for them. One can't blame the new-born babes or the young girls who were children when Hitler first showed his head. One can't blame the poor old peasants who lost their sons in the First World War and their grandsons in the Second. They didn't want it. But we had to destroy Hitler, didn't we?"

"That's all right," said Nigel, "but as one of the destroying angels I think we overdid it in the bombing line. There was a night in Berlin when masses of refugees from East Prussia were crowded round the railway stations—women and children mostly, I dare say. We might have given them a respite. We didn't, we carried out orders, of course. Nothing to be proud of. Mass murder. Sometimes I dream about it. Not pleasant dreams."

"That's war," said Pamela.

"Yes," said Nigel, "that's war! That's how people who call themselves civilized behave to each other—rather humorous, don't you think? How these Christians love one another!"

He gave a harsh, mirthless laugh.

“And now?” asked Pamela. “This talk of another war, this terrible talk, Nigel! Is there any truth in it? If so I shan’t have any babies.”

Nigel stared at her with brooding eyes.

“We destroyed one dictatorship. Now another, more ruthless, more cunning, evil like the other, out for the same goal, has taken over and presses forward. They’re coming pretty close with their puppet states, I mean pretty close to us—easy ranges for atom bombs!”

“What can we do about it?” asked Pamela, with a kind of despair in her eyes.

“One of two things,” he answered. “Appeasement or resistance. The first didn’t work very well with Hitler. It won’t work very well with Messrs. Stalin and Molotov, I imagine. But resistance means war and all hell let loose.”

“Nigel,” said Pamela, “there’s something terrible in this talk of ours. I mean even in the talk itself. We’re both pretty young. I’m looking forward to marriage. You have Henriette. Is our hope of happiness just an illusion to be ended in dust and ashes?”

“Perhaps there’s something else,” said Nigel, cautiously.

“Something else?”

“The Afterwards,” said Nigel. “Survival after death. A better time for all. If there’s no hope in this world there may be some in the next—if there is a next. Perhaps that’s the origin of religion—man’s dissatisfaction with the conditions of life on earth. He had to find a God or many gods with promises of better things to come hereafter if he obeyed the tribal laws.”

“I want to be happy now,” said Pamela urgently. “I want to fulfil my love.”

“What kind of love?” asked Nigel with an ironical laugh. “Some forms of love are demoralizing. The very word ‘love’ has been debased. Those frightful crooners on the B.B.C.!”

He broke off suddenly and laughed again.

“Cripes! We’re becoming too serious. It’s a mistake to make a habit of it. *Il faut cultiver notre jardin.* I must get on with my weaving. I wish Henriette would show herself now and then.”

Pamela went downstairs and looked round for Henriette with the idea of having a talk with her. It was not much fun for that French girl in this old house and English village, especially as it was raining every day and now with south-westerly gales howling through the woods. There were not many young

people in the neighbourhood and no gay company for a girl who was young enough to need it. It was a pity that the click of the shuttle in Nigel's work-room was getting on her nerves.

Henriette was generally curled up on the sofa in the drawing-room with one of her detective novels, but she was not there when Pamela looked for her. There were voices in the study where Robin Melville worked as a rule. Pamela heard Henriette's voice with its French intonation and with every syllable clear-cut.

"Why do you avoid me, Robin? Why are you afraid of me?"

Pamela heard Robin Melville's answer.

"I am afraid of myself."

Henriette laughed.

"You're very timid. You are like a frightened little boy. Am I so very dangerous?"

"It's all very dangerous," said Melville.

Henriette laughed again.

"It is a cure for the *cafard*—what you call the boredom, and oh, I am so very bored! *Enormement ennuyée cette pauvre Henriette.* Talk to me, Robin. Tell me what is in your mind. Tell me what is in your heart."

The study door was open. These two voices were perfectly audible. Pamela slipped away, not wishing to be an eavesdropper, and went upstairs again to her own room. What she had overheard was rather alarming.... Well, perhaps there was nothing in it really. Henriette was having a flirtation with Robin Melville and teasing him, scaring him a bit because he was so shy and so easily embarrassed.

"I wonder!" said Pamela to herself, very thoughtfully. "I hope she won't hurt Nigel. He has been hurt enough already."

It was really rather alarming.

CHAPTER XII

THAT evening Henriette slipped out of the drawing-room after dinner and Nigel had gone to his father's study to find a book. Pamela was alone with her mother who was writing letters by the light of a standard lamp at a little desk of the French Empire period. Pamela was snuggled deep in an arm-chair pretending to read that week's copy of *Time and Tide* but really thinking of Julian away in Berlin. She had had a letter from him that morning by air mail. He was coming home in a few weeks now.

I'm yearning for you [he wrote], *I want to hold you in my arms again. Your Greek faun is very miserable and goes about Berlin looking like a Melancholy Jacques.*

Suddenly her mother stopped writing letters, threw some envelopes into the wastepaper-basket, heaved a sigh of satisfaction at having coped with this correspondence, and gave a little laugh.

"Well, I've ticked off that woman! Didn't like what I said at the W.I. I won't put up with impertinence of that kind from anybody even if she is the Vicar's wife."

"Shall I make you a cup of tea, Mother?" asked Pamela. "You've been working so hard."

"Good gracious, no! I like working. Thank God I have an active mind and a strong constitution. Now I must have a look at *The Times*, much as I loathe it. Its leading articles make me sick. They're always pandering to the Labour Government with a disgusting pretence of impartiality."

She picked up *The Times* but looked across at Pamela as though reminded of something.

"By the way, Pamela, what's all this nonsense about a young man in Berlin? Hinchcliffe, or something. I hope you've put that well out of your mind. You didn't answer my last letter in which I expressed my views on the subject, not too strongly, I hope!"

So it had come, the inevitable row. There was no way of avoiding it. Pamela hoped the argument would not be too prolonged or too painful.

"I haven't put it out of mind, Mother," she answered firmly. "Julian and I

—Julian Inchbold—are going to get married. He will be back in a few weeks now."

She saw a faint flush colour her mother's cheeks.

"Pamela," said Lady Bramley quite quietly—with unusual quietude—"you are not going to marry that man. It is quite out of the question. I forbid you to do so. That is enough, I hope."

Pamela became rather pale. She had always been a little afraid of her mother, whose rules of righteousness were unswerving, whose code of honour was severe, whose word had always been law in this household. Her father she knew, so quick-tempered himself, at times irritable and irascible now that he was getting old, though kind, tolerant, and sweet-natured as a rule, was intimidated by his strong-minded and dominating wife, though sometimes he chaffed her and avoided a clash by a humorous remark or a "Just as you like, my dear." As a young boy even Nigel, her pet, had minded his p's and q's in her presence and the servants respected but feared her because of her commanding personality, not without good nature so long as she obtained obedience. But now it was necessary for Pamela to hold her own. She could not surrender. It would be the surrender of her love and her own right to decide her future life. She was no longer a little girl to be bullied and frightened.

"Mother," said Pamela, "you can't forbid me to marry Julian. You have no right to forbid me. I'm a grown woman. I'm old enough to choose my own way of life. Nothing will make me stop marrying Julian. I'm sorry you're prejudiced against him. I don't see any reason in it."

Lady Bramley answered sharply.

"You know perfectly well my reasons, Pamela. It's a question of respect for your father's name. It's a matter of loyalty to your father and myself."

"In what way?" asked Pamela a little angrily. "I fail to see in what way, Mother. Surely you're not going to drag in politics! We're not living in the sixteenth century. We've got beyond the days of the Montagues and Capulets."

Lady Bramley made a gesture of irritation.

"Don't talk nonsense, child. We haven't abandoned all decencies and tradition. Though I admit they're disappearing. I will leave out my own detestation of the Labour Government, my firm belief that these people are on their way to Communism, and are fast reducing this unfortunate country to a state of squalor and serfdom—some of them through ignorance, no doubt—they can't even speak the King's English—others with deliberate intention and fanatical faith."

“What has that got to do with the question?” asked Pamela. “Julian doesn’t believe in the Labour Government.”

“He’s the son of a Labour member—a most objectionable man who has the impertinence to criticize Mr. Churchill and talks disgusting nonsense in the B.B.C. discussions, as he did the other night. What will the world say if they hear that the daughter of Lord Bramley is going to marry the son of that man? It would drag down your father’s name to the dirt. It would make him a laughing stock in the House of Lords. It would be too shameful and too ridiculous. I appeal to your good sense, Pamela. You must see all this. I appeal to your love for your dear father, whose name stands very high in England—and the world.”

Pamela answered her with suppressed exasperation.

“Mother, you’re hopelessly old-fashioned! You’re thinking in terms of the mid-Victorian era. I expect you to use the word *mésalliance*! Don’t you know that caste has gone? After all, there are many Labour Peers. You keep on talking about Father and his name. Nobody respects it more than I do, but I’m sure he doesn’t think like you. He only wants me to be happy. Wait till he comes back. Let me talk to him.”

“Your father is sometimes very weak, especially with his children,” said Lady Bramley. “I have to safeguard him. I have always guarded him, thank heaven.”

Pamela laughed slightly.

“Poor father! He hates being guarded. Above all, he hates family fuss of any kind.”

Lady Bramley tightened her lips. She was getting angry.

“His family have a right to fuss. They have a sense of loyalty and in a case like this it’s their bounden duty to intervene. I don’t mind telling you that I’ve already discussed this question with your aunts Louisa and Elizabeth. They are simply outraged at the mere idea.”

Pamela sprang up from her chair. Little flames leapt into her eyes.

“Damn my aunts!” she cried. “Mother, how dare you discuss my affairs with those old cats?”

“They are always very kind to you,” Lady Bramley answered icily. “Then there’s your Uncle Archibald. Chairman of the Ewbank Conservative Association—only yesterday he made a brilliant speech—well, a little ponderous perhaps, but most impressive—on the Labour Government’s

betrayal of the British Navy by scrapping all our first-class battleships. I had a word with him after the meeting. I asked him what he knew about a man named Inchbold. 'One of those damn' Labour fellows,' he said. 'Most poisonous.' When I told him that you proposed to marry this man's son he went purple—absolutely purple—in the face. 'Pamela?' he asked with the greatest incredulity. 'It's unbelievable!' He was deeply upset."

Pamela was very pale now, but there was a smouldering fire in her eyes.

"Mother," she said, "you make me furious. I want to smash things. What have these doddering old dead-heads to do with my private life—with my love for any man I care to love? It's all too ridiculous. If I weren't so angry I should laugh. Nobody would believe that people could hold such views after two World Wars and a social revolution. It's medieval. It's utterly out of date, Mother."

Lady Bramley refused to admit that.

"On the contrary, it's very up to date. People are beginning to feel very passionately about these things. Labour is dividing this country into two camps. The Right stands firm against the Left. You have no idea of the intensity of feeling in the Housewives' League. I know because I am on the Council."

"Mother," cried Pamela, "I won't listen to any more. I'm going to marry Julian Inchbold whatever his father is like. I happen to love him. I won't have my love spoilt by ridiculous uncles and aunts. I won't let you bully me, Mother. I have as strong a will as you have. I'll get on with my own life as I like. I'll—I'll——"

Suddenly she burst into tears and went quickly from the room. In her own room upstairs she dabbed her eyes and pulled herself together.

"In three weeks," she said aloud, "I shall be married to Julian."

CHAPTER XIII

Lord Bramley had made an impressive speech in the debate on the Government's proposal to restrict the delaying power of the Lords to one year. On behalf of the Opposition he had supported the proposal for an all-party conference on the reform of the Second Chamber and had startled some of their lordships, the old reactionaries and die hards, by his ridicule of the hereditary privilege which enabled the son of a peer, even if he were a half-wit, to sit in the Second Chamber.

"You went too far, Bramley," was the comment of a brother peer. "You were too damned ironical! You made me feel quite uncomfortable. Why, bless my soul, it might have been a Labour Peer speaking."

"Oh, I just uttered a few platitudes," answered Lord Bramley carelessly. "We're mostly agreed that the Second Chamber needs reshaping to bring it into tune with modern ideas. It's an anachronism as it stands. It belongs to the era of King John's barons."

"You're too darned liberal," said the noble lord irritably. "It's opening the gates to the Goths and Vandals."

"If we don't do something about it they'll force the gates," answered Lord Bramley, "and I don't blame 'em."

He returned by car to Church Hampden, and was in time to have a talk with Pamela before she returned to town. Her bag was already being put by old Meggs into a hired car—it was being driven by Dick Barnes—when Lord Bramley stepped out of his own.

"What's all this?" he asked. "Miss Pamela going already?"

Old Meggs nodded.

"Miss Pamela is waiting to see your lordship before she starts. She's been crying, I'm afraid, if my old eyes don't deceive me. Oh dear! Oh dear!"

"Your old eyes and your old tongue, Meggs, should be more discreet."

Lord Bramley uttered the rebuke with a laugh. He had a soft spot in his heart for old Meggs.

Pamela was waiting for him in his study.

"Hullo, Daddy, I'm glad you're back. I'm just off."

She put a hand on his shoulder and kissed his cheek.

"Why this hurry?" he asked. "Why not stay a few weeks?"

Pamela gave a little laugh which was not exactly mirthful.

"Mother and I are not on speaking terms! I find the situation painful. I'm going to stay with Cousin Betty."

"Had a row?" asked her father, taking off his coat and throwing it over a chair.

"A terrific row! Mother tried to bully me and I wouldn't stand for it."

Her father smiled dryly.

"Thank heaven I wasn't here. I hate family rows, especially with your mother. She has many of the qualities of Queen Elizabeth who brooked no contradiction."

He laughed again.

"A noble character all the same. One of the old tradition, disappearing now. I've a great respect for her. I told you there would be a row—about that fellow Inchbold, I suppose?"

"Yes, Father. And I'm going to marry him in exactly three weeks if we can arrange it in time."

"You're just as obstinate as your mother," said Lord Bramley. "Not a pin to choose between you!"

He pinched her ear and said: "You're darned pretty, my dear. It's a lucky lad who marries you."

"Father," said Pamela seriously, "do you think I'm going to disgrace your name if I marry the son of Stephen Inchbold? Are you as old-fashioned as that?"

He smiled at her under his shaggy white eyebrows.

"It's a bit awkward. I shall get a lot of chaff but I can take it. As a matter of fact I'm very friendly with some of those Labour fellows. I often have a chat with them. They're good enough to ask my advice sometimes. I'm not a fanatic though I'm against out-and-out Socialism."

"Mother breathes fire and flame," said Pamela.

Her father gave a kind of laughing groan.

“Your mother sees things all black or all white. In this life they’re mostly grey.”

“Father,” said Pamela, “I shall have to be going soon. I can’t keep young Barnes waiting too long as he has another engagement after taking me to the station. Shall I see you before my wedding?”

Lord Bramley held his daughter’s arm in a tight grip.

“So you’ve made up your mind?”

“Absolutely, Father.”

“Well, if you feel like that I can’t stop you, and you’re quite right. Follow your own light. Parents have no earthly right to interfere with their children’s love or marriage except to give advice in a friendly way, knowing that it won’t be taken. Come and see me in town. I shall spend a night or two at the flat.”

“Oh, that’s grand, Father. I shall feel rather frightened before I take the plunge.”

“Yes, it’s a big adventure, especially for women. Well, God bless you. I admire your spirit.”

Pamela threw her arms round her father and hugged him and her eyes were wet again.

“Thanks, Father, you were always kind and sweet to me. You always stood between me and Mother’s wrath. I must go!”

She went out of his study, ran down the steps and dived into the hired car.

Lord Bramley went for his usual ‘breath of air’, as he called it, after lunch. He liked walking through the village and passing the time of day with his friends. He generally stopped to have a chat with the hedger and ditcher who had been a regular soldier and was a man of intelligence. He leaned over the half-door of the old blacksmith’s work-shop and said: “Hullo, Burnaby! Still making the sparks fly? How’s the missus?” He still had a few suckers from that month’s sweet ration and doled them out to three or four schoolchildren who greeted him with grins and expectant eyes.

“Learning anything at school, Judy?”

“Not much,” answered Judy. “Nobody does.”

“Oh, that’s bad news.”

“I’m good at arithmetic,” said a small boy.

Lord Bramley expressed his admiration.

"Good for you, Peter. I wish I was. I always get my accounts wrong."

"I've painted a picture for you," said a small girl aged six or thereabouts. "I've been saving it for you. Here it is."

Lord Bramley scrutinized this artistic effort.

"My word! That's pretty good. Fine colour, Peggy."

"You're looking at it the wrong way up," said Peggy with great scorn.

"Bless my soul, so I am! Well it's almost as good the wrong way up. That's a very fine bit of work, my dear, and most kind of you to do it for me."

"Mother says you're a good old sort," said Peggy.

"That's nice of her! Give her my kind regards."

"She says I ought to call you 'my lord' and curtsey when I see you. Silly, I call it!"

"Old-fashioned," answered Lord Bramley. "Well, be good or, if you can't be good, be happy."

He liked children. They were truth-tellers. They were utterly sincere. Egoists of course. All children are egoists. But up to a certain age they made no difference between old people and young people. He liked being on the level with them. They seemed to like his company. They trusted him. He liked to feel small hands slipping into his on the way to the village. Perhaps he was a sentimentalist getting a bit *gaga*. Some of his critics called him a cynic. Rose called him a widdy-waddy because he was not so intolerant as she liked. Well, one couldn't please everybody. This afternoon he was going to please himself. He was going to call on Mrs. Bosanquet, his dearest Julia, the mother of those three children with whom he had played tiger a night or two ago. They would be at school this afternoon. He could have a quiet talk with Julia Bosanquet, the wisest woman he knew and the most charming.

He touched a bell in the porch of Jasmine Cottage, once, as he remembered, an old hovel but now made habitable and attractive.

"Your mistress at home?" he asked a little maid whom he knew as the daughter of Mrs. Wigley in one of the Council cottages.

"Yes, my lord, playing the pianner."

"How nice! Don't interrupt her, I'll walk into the sitting-room."

He went quietly into a room to the right of the little hall, ducking his head

to avoid its beam. It was a room with a low ceiling and old windows with diamond-shaped panes. The floorboards were stained and polished, with a rug here and there. On the walls were some pleasant water-colours. He liked this room. It had a fragrance, he thought, and it was more cosy than his own Georgian rooms, square and uncompromising with high ceilings. The tiled fireplace here was one of the oldest in Church Hampden as he could tell by the brickwork.

Julia Bosanquet was playing something by Grieg, he thought. She played, in his opinion, with an exquisite touch. The light from one of the lattice windows touched her fair brown hair, giving it a kind of halo. Well, that wasn't surprising to Lord Bramley who thought she deserved a halo. One of the windows was open on this day in early February, astoundingly mild, and he could hear the chattering of birds as an accompaniment to this music which she played softly.

She seemed to be aware of his presence instantly and swung round on the piano-stool with a smile.

"How good of you to come!" she exclaimed.

"Not good at all. Sheer selfishness. It's good and kind of you to let me come."

Mrs. Bosanquet laughed and she had a pleasant bell-like laugh.

"Well, we won't bandy compliments. You know I love talking to you."

"Why?" asked Lord Bramley. "I believe you when you say that because you're a very truthful lady, but I want to know why you like talking to me, or rather why you let me talk to you so often in endless monologues with the garrulity of old age. With the egoism of a doddering old man. Tell me."

"I'll tell you," said Mrs. Bosanquet. "Only first of all take off that overcoat. Hasn't it been raining again?"

"I don't mind the rain, and anyhow it hasn't rained for an hour or more."

He let himself be helped out of his coat though he needed no help.

"Tell me," he said again. "Do you mind if I smoke a pipe? Rose won't let me smoke pipes in the drawing-room."

"You know I love the smell of it, but aren't we being very formal with one another. It's not the first time you've smoked a pipe in this room! You've been doing it for four years off and on when I have the luck to get a visit from you."

"The luck!" he exclaimed. "But why, my dear? Why should you think it

lucky when a frightful old bore calls on you?”

“That’s the same question you asked a minute ago!” she cried in a laughing way.

“Exactly,” said Lord Bramley, “and I want you to be honest with me. I want to get this straight, as the Americans say.”

He sat down on one of her upright chairs and took a pipe from his pocket. She held a box of matches ready for him.

“The answers are honest and easy,” she told him. “You are not a doddering old man. You never will be a doddering old man. Secondly, you tell me all the things I want to know. Thirdly, you are the fairest-minded man in the world as far as I know the world. Fourthly, it’s a great honour to have a visit from Lord Bramley whose name will live for ever in English history.”

“Bosh!” said Lord Bramley. “History be damned!”

“Fifthly, I love you very much. I’m going to make you a cup of tea.”

“I should like to believe you,” said Lord Bramley.

“Do you think I’m lying to you, my lord?” asked Mrs. Bosanquet, as though quoting a line from Shakespeare.

“Well, you give me great happiness,” he answered. “This is my little sanctuary and I’m old enough to love or be loved by any pretty woman without scandal. That’s the one advantage of reaching a certain age.”

“I’m not so sure!” said Mrs. Bosanquet. “There are some women in this village who would make a scandal about St. Peter if he happened to pay visits to a widow woman like me. I’ve not the slightest doubt that everybody in Church Hampden will know that you have called on me this afternoon. Then there will be a wagging of tongues and a shaking of heads.”

“Do you mind?” asked Lord Bramley, looking amused at this warning.

“Not in the least! Let them enjoy themselves, poor dears. They must have a little drama somehow. Scandal provides the drama of village life.”

“True!” said Lord Bramley with his humorous look. “I’m partial to a bit of it myself. I much enjoyed whispered remarks about the late vicar and Lady Isabel. It took one’s thoughts off the awful mess in the world and the menace of Russia, and the possibility of atomic warfare. Did you say something about a cup of tea?”

“I did. I’ll go and make it myself. Molly makes it like dish-water. I shan’t be three minutes.”

"How good of you!" remarked Lord Bramley. "How kind you are to me always! What have I done to deserve it?"

"Now don't get on to that again," said Mrs. Bosanquet, laughing at him. "Take it for granted. No compliments, please, between you and me. We're old friends now, aren't we?"

"Four years," he answered. "Four years of friendship, very precious to me."

"I'm going to talk to you seriously when I come back," she warned him before leaving the room.

He wondered what serious things she wanted to discuss. Then he looked round the little room with a kind of tenderness in his eyes, a tenderness never seen in the House of Lords, where they accused him of cynicism and satire. This room, as he had said, had come to be his little sanctuary. He felt a sense of peace and restfulness in this room. Here he could talk intelligently to a woman of intelligence with an open mind and a sense of balance, which was very rare and refreshing. He was unaffected by political slogans and shibboleths. He had a passion for facts. He always wanted to know the real facts untainted by partisanship or prejudice. Sometimes she startled him by her intellectual penetration below the surface of things. She put new ideas and points of view into his head. She thought many things in the Socialist programme were good, unlike all the women of her class in Church Hampden and its neighbourhood. But she also thought many of them were bad and gave her reasons, which were logical and remarkably far-seeing. She was a critic of the Conservatives, though she leaned away from the Labour Government or at least its Left Wing fanatics. He liked talking to her. He was thirty years older and yet astonishingly, like one of the village children, she bridged the gulf and did not seem to be aware of it, and talked as though he were of her own age. Her husband had been killed in the War, poor fellow, but with those three adorable children she put a brave face on everything, including poverty. He knew, or partly guessed, what burdens she had had to bear in wartime with three babes and an absent husband, and how hard she had to work in peacetime without a Nanny for those children, the daily queueing up for food in Ashleigh market town at the end of a bus ride, constant sewing and mending. Yet she kept her gaiety, and was full of fun when the children came home from their day school, and found time to play the piano. Marvellous, heroic, he thought.

She came back with the tea and poured out a cup for him and for herself.

"This is good," she said. "An early cup of tea and a friend to share it. How's her ladyship?"

She asked the question with a smile, having been snubbed several times by her ladyship.

"Busy and bellicose," said Lord Bramley, answering her smile. "There's been the deuce of a row about Pamela. That young woman intends to marry the son of a Labour member, Stephen Inchbold. You may know his name."

"Quite well," said Mrs. Bosanquet. "He takes part in political discussions on the wireless sometimes. I like his sincerity and his provincial accent which seems to help it. I find myself agreeing with some of his ideas. But I can quite see that Lady Bramley isn't quite pleased about it. She's not exactly lenient to the Labour Government!"

"She would pour boiling oil over them, theoretically of course. In actual fact she's a kind woman though a little difficult now and then."

He gave a humorous kind of groan, having had to put up with many difficulties.

"I'm afraid she'll never forgive Pamela if she marries that fellow. She regards it as high treason. She thinks it's disgracing my name."

"Do you?" asked Mrs. Bosanquet.

"My name can look after itself," he answered simply. "It's old in history."

"And you've done much to enrich it, my lord!" said Mrs. Bosanquet, with mock solemnity and yet believing what she said.

He made a gesture of indifference with a thin long hand.

"I shall be judged fairly or unfairly when I'm dead and gone. I've tried to do the best for my country but it makes very little difference. The individual counts for next to nothing whatever office he holds. Public opinion, new trends of thought, world forces are more powerful than anything he can do. Well do I know it, Julia!"

Julia Bosanquet was sitting on a low stool by the tea-table. She seemed to be thinking over his words, looking down at the carpet with her eyes veiled by her long lashes; presently she looked up at him and spoke seriously.

"I don't believe you're right. Sometimes the whole course of history is changed by one man or masses of people inspired by one man. Buddha. Mahomet. Gandhi. Not always for the good, of course. One has to think of Hitler and other great gangsters. Still, what I feel sure about is that the individual, if he's big enough, may lead a people by his personality and inspiration. Winston Churchill held us up by the scruffs of our necks during

the War.”

“And let us down with a bump afterwards,” said Lord Bramley with a good-natured laugh. “I like Winston—a marvellous fellow—but I regret his descent into the arena of party politics, his abuse of those who had served with him and under him, as soon as the War ended. A great pity! He ought to have risen above all that.”

“That’s what I’m driving at,” said Mrs. Bosanquet.

Lord Bramley looked at her quizzically with raised eyebrows.

“You’re very serious, my dear, I didn’t know you were driving anywhere.”

She laughed and looked up at him again.

“It’s cheek of me, I know. It’s just an idea. Don’t think it too absurd.”

Lord Bramley’s eyes softened.

“I shall never think any of your ideas absurd. What’s this one?”

Mrs. Bosanquet hesitated with a Mona Lisa smile before she spoke.

“It seems to me that we’re all in need of some new leadership, some new inspiration. The world’s in an awful mess, isn’t it?”

“It certainly is,” agreed Lord Bramley.

“In a way,” said Julia Bosanquet, “the lead ought to come from our people. I mean, other nations seem wistful for England to give a lead. Of course I’m only judging from what I read in the papers now and then. They may be wrong.”

“I think they’re right,” answered Lord Bramley. “But we don’t give it. The War has weakened us too much. Our economic position is too precarious. We’re a bankrupt nation. We’re abandoning our old place in the world. We haven’t even got a Navy now.”

Julia Bosanquet seemed to be thinking hard. There was a little line on her forehead—a kind of frown due to intensity of thought—though her lips were faintly smiling.

“It’s ridiculous of me to go on talking like this, as if I knew anything about this kind of thing! But I’m going on talking.”

“Keep right on, lady!” said Lord Bramley, giving a feeble imitation of an American accent.

“I listen to the wireless speeches and discussions,” she said. “They’re quite

good—all about our difficulties, and about coal and steel and production for export, and the dollar gap, and all that. But there's no inspiration in it. No flame of the spirit, very little idealism if I may use such an over-worked word. Don't you agree?"

"I do," said Lord Bramley. "One can't say that such stuff awakes the soul of a people."

"Then there's the party fight," said Mrs. Bosanquet. "Politicians are called to the microphone and sling abuse at the other side or drag in a defence of their own party whatever may be the subject of discussion. I get so tired of the party propaganda. It's all so petty, isn't it?"

Lord Bramley raised his hands with a gesture of disgust.

"Nobody hates it more than I do. It's mostly a sham fight though with fanatics on both sides who thrive on hatred and abuse. There are some people who must be gingered up by hatred. Without it they feel that the fire has gone out. But really, getting down to fundamentals, there's very little difference between the moderate-minded men on both sides of the House and less still, I believe, in the country. The English people are essentially in the middle of the road. Liberalism suited them best and it's a pity the old Liberal Party has faded out."

"Could the Conservatives take off the controls and go back to individualism?" asked Julia Bosanquet.

"How could they? With world shortages in almost everything there must be planning and controls in the present state of this country menaced by famine unless we get American aid, and that pretty quickly. We must keep up rationing not only in food but in clothing and other things. Then there's the foreign situation, the menace of Moscow and the terrible talk of a new World War. We couldn't act much differently from the Labour Government. They're taking the right line, I think, the only line—a Western Union as a counterpoise to the Eastern *bloc*."

"Well, then..." said Mrs. Bosanquet thoughtfully—so thoughtfully that she had a moment of silence.

"What's your idea, lady?" asked Lord Bramley, smiling at her.

She answered his smile, amused at herself perhaps for intellectual audacity in the presence of a man who had held high offices of State.

"What we want," she said, "in this time of national emergency is a new leader and a new party, a new inspiration, and new fire of the spirit. Winston

called to the old tradition of England in time of war and it came to meet him out of the slums and the factories, not only from the men but from the young girls and the old women sitting under air raids in little houses one brick thick. Now we want another voice to speak to us and to raise us up and set us on fire and bring out the best in us above quarrels about wages and discussions about party politics. I'm all for a kind of centre party with the best from each side."

Lord Bramley laughed.

"I've been playing with that idea myself as an intellectual amusement. Quite impossible really. Who's going to lead the new party? Whose is the voice to rouse the old spirit of the nation?"

"You are the man!" Mrs. Bosanquet threw out her arm and pointed a finger at him. "Yours is the voice!"

Lord Bramley stared at her with his keen smiling eyes and his mouth was humorous.

"Nonsense, my dear."

"Why nonsense?"

"I'm an old man. Sixty-five. Oh lord!"

"A chicken," she told him. "The prime of life. Look at Bernard Shaw, writing plays at ninety-two or something. What else is nonsense?"

"People have forgotten me. I mean nothing to them now."

"You have the respect of the whole nation. Lots of people love you for what you did during the War, for the way you spoke to them over the wireless."

Lord Bramley shook his head with its luxuriant white hair.

"I wish I could believe it. In any case I haven't the gift of leadership. I haven't that flame of the spirit you talk about. I'm a very ordinary fellow."

"You're not," said Mrs. Bosanquet firmly. "You're the fairest-minded man in England, the most tolerant, the most sweet-natured, the wisest."

"My dear, you mustn't talk like that. You make me blush."

"You have great gifts of leadership if you like to use them," said Julia Bosanquet. "You have a beautiful voice. You have a natural eloquence."

"A glib tongue," said his lordship.

"And you're nice to look at," said Mrs. Bosanquet, looking at him as

though for the first time.

Lord Bramley coloured up and laughed at her.

“If I were a conceited jackanapes I should get a swelled head. Thank you, my dear, for your good opinion of me—very inaccurate, but very comforting.”

“I’m quite serious,” she assured him. “I shall go on nagging at you. You’ll have to start that campaign for a new party and a new spirit.”

“Not a chance!” he told her.

Mrs. Bosanquet’s serious conversation was violently interrupted by the incursion of her three children back from school. They set up a shout of delight at the sight of Lord Bramley.

“Tiger! Tiger!”

Lord Bramley was coerced into a game of tiger before he walked back to his own house.

CHAPTER XIV

Before Pamela's Julian was demobilized and back in England she called on his parents. That was against his wish, as he wrote in answer to one of her letters in which she said how much she wanted to know his father and mother.

Wait till I get home [he wrote]. *Relations are a bit strained between me and my honoured sire. It's quite unnecessary to call on them until I take you to see them.*

Somehow she thought it was necessary. It was absurd of Julian to be so sensitive about his parents' humble origin and his father's political creed. It seemed to her unkind and snobbish not to make herself known to them.

She found Stephen Inchbold's private address in the telephone book. *Stephen Inchbold, M.P., Overstrand Mansions, Battersea Park.*

She was staying with her cousin Betty, her Uncle Archibald's daughter, who had a tiny flat in Sloane Avenue, Chelsea, where she wrote serial stories for a woman's magazine which made her very independent of her disapproving parents.

"How does one get to Battersea Park?" asked Pamela, interrupting her cousin's literary labour and the furious tick-tack of a typewriter.

"One doesn't," answered Betty, adjusting another sheet of paper and popping a chocolate into her mouth. "Nobody ever goes to Battersea Park. It's on the other side of the river. It's beyond the Pale."

"Don't be absurd!" answered Pamela. "I want to go there."

"In Victorian days," said Betty, "before my time, you know, Battersea Park had a brief period of fashion. Ladies and gentlemen from Mayfair used to drive up with their bicycles or in hansom cabs and ride round the park in grotesque costumes. I've seen photographs of them—enough to make a cat laugh!"

"How does one get there?" asked Pamela again.

"Take a taxi, my dear. Or take some sandwiches and walk."

Pamela took a taxi. It was a very short way from Chelsea and she arrived in Overstrand Mansions, Prince of Wales Avenue, in next to no time, she thought. It was a Saturday afternoon at half past three. Some of the inhabitants of Prince of Wales Avenue were taking the air, which was mild and damp. No

doubt they were on their way to the park with their babies in perambulators. She liked the look of these young couples. They looked happy though shabby, as everybody was shabby now. Some of the young fathers wore corduroy trousers. One at least of the young mothers wore scarlet slacks.

Pamela felt rather nervous at this visit. She hoped Julian wouldn't be angry with her. She hoped she would make a good impression on his family. He had a sister called Marjorie studying at the London School of Economics.

It was a long way up the stone stairs to Number 37. From one of the flats half-way up emerged a yellow-haired lady with a little pom on a lead which barked furiously at Pamela.

"Don't be silly, darling!" said the yellow-haired lady. "You're as bad-tempered as Mr. Molotov. So very naughty, you dear little devil!"

She smiled amiably at Pamela before coaxing her little beast downstairs.

Pamela touched the electric bell of Number 37. She was out of breath and felt nervous. The door was opened by a young girl in khaki shorts and a white shirt. She had a sweet in one side of her mouth making her cheek bulge as though she had toothache.

"Are you Marjorie?" asked Pamela.

The girl looked surprised but laughed good-naturedly.

"That's right! Do I know you or do you know me?"

"I'm Pamela Faraday. Perhaps you've heard of me. I'm going to marry Julian."

"Gosh!" exclaimed Marjorie Inchbold.

She looked Pamela up and down with a frank and approving scrutiny.

"Excuse me a second," she said. "I must get rid of this sucker. It's rather foul. Anyhow, it's a conversation stopper."

She leaned over the banisters on the landing and spat out the sweet which went down five floors.

"I hope there was no one underneath—unless it was that yellow-haired cat with a poisonous pom," she said. "Come in. I suppose you want to meet my Pa and Ma."

"Yes," said Pamela. "Are they at home?"

"Ma's at home. Pa will be back for tea. He's probably doing a constitutional in the park and pondering over the political situation which is

rather sticky at the moment. Veto on rising wages. Cripes! There'll be a row with the T.U.C. Come in, won't you?"

She took Pamela into a small hall with a bamboo hat-stand, and called out in a high voice.

"Ma! Wake up, old dear. There's an important visitor to see you. Lord Bramley's daughter."

She turned to Pamela with a grin.

"Ma always has a little nap at this time. Come into the sitting-room. I'll put on the electric fire."

"Oh, please don't for my sake," said Pamela. She liked this girl Marjorie already. She was so fresh and frank and friendly.

"That's all right," said Marjorie. "The fuel situation has improved. No more cuts, thank goodness. I froze to death last winter. I began to lose my faith in Labour. Sit down, won't you. Have a sucker?"

She held out a paper bag containing boiled sweets.

"No thanks," said Pamela, smiling at her.

"Well, they are rather filthy. Taste like toothpaste."

She looked at Pamela again and then laughed.

"It's funny you being here," she said.

"Why?" asked Pamela.

"Lord Bramley's daughter. One of the Faradays famous in English history. They used to grind the faces of the poor. I mean they belonged to the nobility and gentry of this land. Now your father makes reactionary speeches in the House of Lords."

"He's very liberal-minded really," said Pamela.

Marjorie looked sceptical.

"My father began his career on three and sixpence a week in the railway yards of Rugby. My mother was a factory hand. I'm not ashamed of that."

"Why should you be?" asked Pamela. "I should be proud of it."

Marjorie stared at her again as though testing her sincerity. Then she darted a sudden question.

"Are you really going to marry Julian?"

"Yes. Very soon I hope."

"I wouldn't if I were you," said the girl. "It's very risky for you."

"I'm taking the risk," answered Pamela, laughing at her.

Marjorie shrugged her shoulders.

"You have been warned," she said. "But it's your affair."

"Yes."

Marjorie had another thought on the subject apart from Julian.

"The Inchbolds won't go down with the Faradays. We're not the same clay. I know that. We think differently. We speak differently. We're on opposite sides of the fence. We're natural born enemies."

"No, no!" exclaimed Pamela. "All that is out of date. There's no such thing as caste nowadays. We're all in the same boat together—on rough seas."

"Don't you believe it." Marjorie shook her head. "There's a social revolution going on. Your crowd and mine will have to fight it out. We're going up and you're going down, but the process is only just beginning. At the London School of Economics—but I'll spare you that. Here's Ma."

Pamela rose from her chair as Mrs. Inchbold came into the room—a thin, neat, fresh-complexioned woman who once as factory girl must have been very pretty. She looked shy and almost frightened. But Pamela took her hand and spoke gently.

"I'm Pamela Faraday. I expect Julian has written to you about me. I do so want to know you."

"That's very kind of you, dearie," said Mrs. Inchbold, "but we're very simple folk. We're not in your class at all."

Marjorie laughed at this statement which seemed to bear out her previous argument. But now she put in an amendment.

"Simple but proud, Ma. We don't fawn on the upper classes. After all, Pa is a Member of Parliament. Who knows if he won't be Prime Minister of England one day?"

Mrs. Inchbold ignored this interruption. She was still holding Pamela's hand.

"I'm sure I'm very pleased to meet you, my dear," she said. "But I can't believe that you're going to marry my Julian."

“Why not?” asked Pamela with a smile.

“It’s not natural like,” answered Mrs. Inchbold. “Julian is reaching up above himself. He was always like that, I’m afraid. You being the daughter of a lord ought not to marry my Julian, poor boy.”

“I happen to love him,” answered Pamela with a little laugh. “Doesn’t that settle the matter?”

Marjorie gave a giggle.

“Very romantic! It makes me want to burst into tears.”

“Julian is certainly very lovable,” said his mother. “Of course he has his faults like the rest of us but I won’t have anything said against him. He was my ewe lamb and now I find it hard to believe he’s a captain in the Army.”

“What’s he going to do when he’s demobilized?” asked Marjorie. “That’s what I would like to know. How’s he going to marry you, Miss Faraday? What are you going to live on? As a student of the London School of Economics ——”

“He’ll have to get a job of course,” said Pamela cheerfully. “That won’t be difficult. Meanwhile he has a bit saved up and his gratuity from the Army. But don’t call me Miss Faraday. Call me Pam, won’t you?”

“That goes all right with me, Pam,” said Marjorie, who had none of her mother’s timidity.

“Here’s your father,” said Mrs. Inchbold. “I hear his key in the latch. What a blessing!”

She spoke as though she needed the support of her husband in coping with a delicate situation.

There was a heavy tread in the hall and a man’s voice called out.

“Time for tea yet?”

“I had better go and break the exciting news,” said Marjorie.

She made a dash for the hall and spoke to her father.

“Pa, who do you think is here?”

“Heaven alone knows!” answered Stephen Inchbold. “The Archbishop of Canterbury, Winston Churchill, Mae West?”

“Lord Bramley’s daughter,” said Marjorie. “Pamela Faraday.”

There was a moment’s silence while Stephen Inchbold considered this

surprising news.

“Well, that’s very nice of her,” he said. “Put that umbrella in the hat-stand. It’s a bit wet.”

He was aware that his words could be overheard in the sitting-room. He gave a slight cough and then strode in with his heavy tread.

“It’s good of you to come, Miss Faraday,” he said quietly, holding out his hand.

“We call her Pam,” said Marjorie.

Pamela held the hand of her future father-in-law—a strong big hand which grasped hers firmly. She looked into his very blue eyes—Julian’s eyes.

“I’m so glad to meet you,” she said.

“Same here,” answered Stephen Inchbold. “I know your father slightly. We’ve passed the time of day with each other now and then. He’s always very friendly though we’re on the opposite side of the political arena and he’s in the Lords and I’m in the Commons.”

“My father is always tolerant and fair-minded,” said Pamela.

Stephen Inchbold nodded.

“We want more of that—on both sides. Before I got into the House of Commons I was very bitter and fanatical—stuffed with class consciousness and all that. Now I’ve mellowed a good deal! I can see that a man isn’t necessarily an enemy of the people if he went to Eton and Oxford or has a title to his name. One lives and learns!”

He laughed at this educational process going on in his own mind.

“All the same,” he added, “I’ve no use for the Tories as a crowd, you know. I am a true Labour man. I’m not weakening. I remember too much about the ‘good old days’ when the Tories were in power—the tragedy of unemployment after the last war, the Means Test, Munich and all that.”

“Now then, Dad,” said Mrs. Inchbold, “don’t go talking politics. I’m sure Miss Faraday doesn’t want to hear them.”

“Yes I do!” said Pamela quickly, “and don’t call me Miss Faraday. I’m going to be your daughter-in-law.”

Mrs. Inchbold’s face reddened and she looked distressed.

“I shall never get used to it, and you a Lord’s daughter! I can’t believe it even now, dearie.”

“There’s time to change your mind, Pam,” said Marjorie brightly. “We won’t hold it up against you. If I were you I’d give Julian the go-by. I talk unselfishly because of course I should like to be the sister-in-law of a Peer’s daughter. They’ll think a lot more of me at the London School of Economics—although many of them are Communist and most of the others on the Left.”

“Little children should be seen and not heard,” said Stephen Inchbold severely. “You run away and play, Marjorie. Or better still, help Mother to mend my socks. I’ll take this young lady into my study for a private talk—a secret session, as you may say.”

“Gosh!” exclaimed Marjorie hotly. “I’m old enough to get married myself. I’ve a good mind to marry a Communist and undermine your milk-and-water Socialists.”

Stephen Inchbold was unperturbed by this dark threat but spoke less harshly.

“Anyhow I don’t think it will do any harm if I have a private talk with this young lady. It’s better than a family discussion.”

“Very early Victorian,” was Marjorie’s comment. “Not playing the game, old dear!”

“Come into my study,” said Stephen Inchbold to Pamela, ignoring this protest and accusation.

He led her into a little room on the other side of the hall. It had a roll-top desk, a few chairs, and innumerable books on shelves round the walls.

“My little den,” he observed. “Sometimes I work here late at night. A Member of Parliament has to keep abreast with contemporary history—moving too fast—and there’s always a pack of letters to answer.”

“I suppose so,” said Pamela. She didn’t quite like this private interview but she was reassured by the friendly glint in his eyes.

He put her at her ease perhaps because he spoke for a few minutes of his work in the House of Commons—too many committee meetings, too many visits from constituents, too many long debates sometimes till midnight.

“Not an easy life!” he said. “Still, it has its rewards. One feels very important sometimes. One feels that one’s shaping the destiny of one’s country and perhaps of the world. That’s very flattering to one’s egoism!”

He laughed in a gruff way at his own egoism of which sometimes he was aware.

“It’s a great responsibility,” agreed Pamela.

“Frightening sometimes,” he admitted. “The world being in the state it is and this country up against it.”

Pamela answered this remark with a smile.

“We all seem to be a bit frightened. Father says he’s a frightened man.”

“That’s interesting,” answered Stephen Inchbold. “Why, I wonder?”

“He thinks we’re heading for bankruptcy and possibly for an atomic war.”

Stephen Inchbold groaned.

“I refuse to contemplate that. Still, I must say I’m disappointed with Russia—disappointed and a bit angry—that daily abuse of us; their deliberate misrepresentation.”

He was silent for a moment as though thinking deeply of these things and then spoke after a gruff laugh.

“I didn’t bring you into this room to discuss the state of the world. It’s about Julian I want to speak.”

“Yes,” said Pamela.

This was Julian’s father, but whatever he said would make no difference to her. She was going to be quite obstinate about that.

“First of all,” said Stephen Inchbold, “I’d like to know what your family think about it. I suppose you’ve told them.”

“Oh, yes,” answered Pamela. “I hate being secretive and underhand.”

“A bit of a shock to them I expect, isn’t it?”

Pamela hesitated. She was not quite sure how much she ought to tell about her mother’s fierce antagonism. It might hurt the feelings of a Labour Member of Parliament. Perhaps it was best to speak frankly. She believed in the truth.

“My father is quite all right about it. He thinks it may be a little bit awkward and lead to public comment, but otherwise he doesn’t mind.”

“That’s fair enough,” said Stephen Inchbold. “But I agree that it will lead to a lot of public comment and it won’t be directed only to his Lordship. What about me? It won’t do me any good if it gets out that my son is marrying the daughter of Lord Bramley. It’s likely to make me a laughing stock in the House of Commons. There’ll be a lot of talk in Rugby where they knew me as a nipper and then as a mechanic on the lowest rung of the ladder. It’ll make me

look damn' ridiculous. It may have a bad effect on my political career. You see what I mean, young lady? We're talking without masks on."

"I'm sorry about that," answered Pamela. "But aren't you thinking in terms of class consciousness?"

Inchbold laughed grimly.

"Certainly I am, and class consciousness is still very powerful. We may pretend it doesn't exist but it's almost as strong as ever, believe me."

"I haven't a particle of it," said Pamela. "Nor has my father. He talks to everybody. He's friends with all his villagers."

Stephen Inchbold smiled at her and she saw how very blue his eyes were, though perhaps with more steel in them than Julian's.

"Your father has a great name. He knows that he will lose nothing by chatting with his villagers, as you call them. *His* villagers, mark you. He lives under the old code of *noblesse oblige*—is that the right way to pronounce it?"

"Quite right," said Pamela.

"Now look at the other point of view," said Mr. Inchbold. "Some of us speak rough. Some of us don't speak the King's English according to Oxford and Cambridge. Some of us in the House of Commons and the Labour Government have been factory hands, miners, day labourers, like the great mass of those who voted for us. We don't like the Oxford accent. It seems like affectation, though it isn't. We don't like being patronized even in a kindly way by people like your father. We have strong prejudices—unjust very likely—against Peers and Landed gentry—the Nobs, as we used to call them in my young days. They were our taskmasters, we remember. They kept us down by their laws and privileges, and their resistance to reform. So you see, my dear young lady, we're very class conscious."

Pamela laughed at this admission and this challenge.

"That seems to me a pity. In any case you are having your revenge. You're taxing us to death. You're wiping us out as a class."

"That's true," said Stephen Inchbold, "and I'm not sorry for it. Your class is an anachronism, my dear, like King John's barons in their walled castles."

"What's all this to do with me and Julian?" asked Pamela, smiling into his eyes.

"Frankly a lot," answered Mr. Inchbold. "I object to my son marrying out of his class. It's disloyalty to me. He's already ashamed of his father and

mother because now he belongs to the officer class. He has ratted against Labour and the principles of Socialism, but he'll feel ill at ease with your family. He'll be a poseur and a charlatan. You won't be happy with him, my dear. I advise you to give him up."

"I won't give him up!" cried Pamela.

She rose from her chair and went to one of the bookshelves though she read no titles because of a sudden wetness in her eyes. She felt angry and hurt and hot under the collar, as men say.

"Everybody wants me to give him up," she said, turning round and speaking emotionally. "It's all ridiculous. It's laughable. Mother accuses me of disloyalty because I want to marry Julian. She says I'm disgracing my father's name. Now you accuse Julian of disloyalty to you and think he's disgracing your name! I couldn't believe such things were possible nowadays after two World Wars and the comradeship in the air-raid shelters and in the Services. I thought the English people had got beyond class consciousness and political enmity."

"You're wrong," said Stephen Inchbold. "Political enmity is increasing in this country, much as I regret it. The Conservatives are becoming passionate in their hatred of Labour. They would like to smudge us out. At all the tea-tables of your class the ladies are very fierce I'm told on good authority. They call us traitors and crooks. You've just admitted that your own mother thinks that you'd be disgracing your father's name if you were to marry the son of a Labour man. That's pretty strong language. That doesn't show political or social tolerance. Frankly, girlie, doesn't she think we're dragging this country down to ruin?"

"She does," Pamela answered angrily. "Perhaps she's right. But I don't care a damn! I'm going to marry Julian. I think I'll go now, please."

"Oh, stay and have a cup of tea," said Mr. Inchbold. "Mother and Marjorie will be very hurt if you don't."

"I'd rather go if you don't mind," said Pamela.

Mr. Inchbold came over and took her hand and patted it.

"I'm sorry, my dear. I don't mean to be unkind. Perhaps I spoke a bit rough. I wanted to make things clear. Now do stay and have a cup of tea. It was kind of you to come and Mother and I like kindness."

Pamela stayed for a cup of tea.

CHAPTER XV

JULIAN arrived at last after many delays and Pamela met him at the airport. He emerged from the plane carrying a kit-bag. He was still in uniform and looked marvellous in the eyes of Pamela greedy for the sight of him again. They embraced in half a gale and pouring rain.

"Good old England!" he exclaimed. "The same old weather!"

"Glad to be back?" she asked.

"You bet! Liberty again. Freedom from Army discipline. 'Yes, sir', 'No, sir'. Freedom from the espionage of superior officers prying into one's private affairs—little pipsqueaks puffed up with self-conceit and a sense of their own importance."

"Do you still love me?"

"Passionately! When do we get married? What about all this family opposition? It makes things awkward, doesn't it?"

She had written to him about her mother's disapproval. She had made it as amusing as possible. It had a funny side to it, she thought.

Julian's idea was to get married at a registry office to avoid all 'fuss' as he called it, and he was insistent upon that. But Pamela wouldn't hear of it. "I shouldn't feel properly married," she told him. "We must have God's blessing on our marriage, Julian."

He had laughed at that and declared himself to be a pagan.

"I'll make a Christian of you," said Pamela, but he shook his head and told her that she would never do that. He didn't believe in religion. He agreed with the Bolshies that it was the opium of the people. He was completely sceptical of all that kind of thing. He really couldn't bring himself to get married in church and mumble all those prayers and listen to an old dodderer laying down the law about the sacredness of marriage.

Pamela had felt hurt about that.

"Don't you believe in the sacredness of marriage?" she asked.

They were sitting together in Betty's small flat which she had abandoned for a few days while she went home on a duty visit. She had covered her

typewriter with a duster. A pile of typewritten sheets—the first part of a serial story—lay in disorder on her desk. A pair of high-heeled shoes stood on the mantelshelf. Betty Faraday was not of a tidy disposition.

Julian shrugged his shoulders at that question about the sacredness of marriage and answered lightly.

"I believe in the sacredness of love. Marriage will last as long as that lasts. In my judgment as a pagan it ought not to last longer than that."

"Oh, Julian," cried Pamela, "isn't that rather menacing to me? Isn't it going to be a rather uncertain marriage?"

"As certain as anything may be," he answered, kissing her right ear as she sat on the floor between his knees, just as she used to do in Berlin. "Unless of course you get tired of me and want to chuck me."

"I shall never get tired of you," she assured him. "But it's very likely you'll get bored with me and fall in love with a more attractive female. Julian, I'm a bit scared. There have been so many unhappy marriages. Lots of girls I know have been deserted by their husbands, sometimes within a year."

"It's all very natural," said Julian, carelessly. "They get fed up with one another. They see they made a hideous mistake. But it won't happen with you and me. I know when I've backed a winner."

"Darling!" cried Pamela, laying her cheek on his knee.

Presently she came back to the subject of their wedding.

"I've arranged it all with Canon Cruikshank at the little church near Lowndes Square. He's a dear old man and he'll keep it very quiet. But he thinks there ought to be a little music and his choir boys will sing like angels."

Julian drew back a little in his chair.

"I told you I wasn't going to be married in church. A registry office for you and me."

Pamela sat up, turned round and faced him.

"No church, no marriage, Julian. That's an ultimatum. I mean it."

They had something like a quarrel about it—not quite a quarrel because Julian laughed it off and seemed to think the whole thing funny.

Once or twice he spoke in a peeved way.

"I shall feel such a fool, standing up there like a figure in Madame Tussaud's and spoiling the creases in my trousers by kneeling on the hard

steps. I shan't know how to make the responses. All that is not in my line."

"You'll do it beautifully," she told him. "For the love of me you'll be worshipful. It's a lovely service, Julian. The old words are so touching if one thinks of all the men and women who spoke them long ago in the springtime of England. 'For better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, till death do us part, and thereto I plight thee my troth.' "

"All that makes me feel uncomfortable," said Julian. "I don't think I can go through with it, Pam. Let me off. Let's take a taxi to that registry office. It's so much simpler, and with both sides of the family against us it won't attract so much notice."

Pamela was quite firm about it.

"Unless you walk with me to church I'll walk away from you, even if I walk with a broken heart and a stricken soul."

She laughed at this tragic picture of herself but he saw that she was serious and obstinate about it. Darned obstinate, he thought, but he had to yield that point to her.

Pamela took Julian to see her father on the afternoon following his arrival. She noticed that he regarded this as an ordeal and exhibited signs of nervousness, tightening his tie several times, smoking a few whiffs of a cigarette and then throwing it away only to light another a few seconds later.

"Frightened of Father?" she asked with a laugh as they walked through Belgrave Square on the way to Chesham Place.

"Highly alarmed," he admitted.

She reassured him.

"You'll find him the kindest of men and the simplest in manner. He has no touch of arrogance or self-conceit. Besides, you'll make a good impression on him. He has a soft spot in his heart for young men, young maidens, small children and big dogs."

"Perhaps he'll think me a dirty dog for daring to marry you," answered Julian, echoing her laugh uneasily. "As I've told you before it is a bit of cheek though I'm not usually self-deprecatory."

Pamela held his hand as they walked through the big empty square in which only a few cars were passing. She was old enough to remember the pre-war years when she went to children's parties in one of these big houses. Now it was taken over by a film company.

“It’s kind of you to marry me, sir!” she said gaily. “I’m the luckiest of women. First in the competition for your grace and beauty.”

He smiled at her sideways and squeezed her hand.

“We’ll have a good time,” he told her.

“Is Lord Bramley in?” asked Pamela of the grey-haired hall porter at his desk in the entrance hall of this big block of service flats.

“Yes, miss. His lordship is waiting for you. He asked me to show you straight up.”

Once again in the lift Julian tightened his tie and smoothed his fair hair.

“Quite all right!” said Pamela smiling at him. “Quite perfect!”

Lord Bramley opened the door himself after Pamela had given a ring at the bell.

“Come in, Pam,” he said genially. “So you’ve brought the man who’s brave enough to marry you?”

He kissed his daughter and then held out his hand to Julian.

“Glad to meet you, Inchbold. I know your father slightly.”

“It’s most kind of you, my lord,” said Julian respectfully.

He had questioned Pamela about the right method of address. Should he call her father ‘my lord’? “Not more than once,” she warned him. After that Lord Bramley, and then in due course, she hoped, ‘Dad’ or ‘Pop’ or whatever he pleased because after all he would be talking to his father-in-law.

Julian had gasped and then grinned at the thought of calling Lord Bramley ‘Dad’. It was incredible. It was ridiculous. However, now he was glad to have got out that one ‘my lord’.

“Pitch your hats and coats on to that chest,” said Lord Bramley. “We’ve had enough rain to drown the fishes.”

He led them into his sitting-room, comfortably furnished with deep arm-chairs and a low settee and a workable-looking writing-desk, upon which Pamela noticed a photograph of herself and one of Mrs. Bosanquet, who was a friend of his. The room had big windows looking out to the roofs and chimney-pots and above them a patch of blue sky with scudding clouds.

“Very good here,” said Pamela. “Julian, you and I can’t afford magnificence like this. A garret for us!”

“It’s not a bad little hole,” said her father. “But it’s dragging me deeper into ruin. I can’t afford it, of course. I can’t afford anything nowadays.”

Julian laughed at this plea of poverty by the great Lord Bramley, Elder Statesman and great aristocrat.

“Poverty is very relative,” he said.

Lord Bramley smiled and shook his head.

“Not nowadays, or at least not so relative as it used to be. Income tax hasn’t quite reduced us all to the same level but pretty nearly. I’m living on my last reserves, like this unfortunate nation. Perhaps they’ll just last out my lifetime. Then death duties and the end.”

“Oh well,” said Pamela carelessly. “It may be good for our souls.”

Her father’s eyes glinted with a smile.

“I won’t dispute that. There are other values. You young people can be happy on next to nothing. If I were young again I wouldn’t funk poverty. An attic room and a gay heart....”

He took a searching look at Julian.

“Is that an old man’s humbug?” he asked.

Julian smiled and showed his white teeth.

“Theoretically it sounds good, but one has to live in order to be happy. It costs quite a lot to keep oneself alive with a little margin for amusement. I shall have to get busy and find a job.”

“Sound idea,” agreed Lord Bramley. “Have you any special line?”

Julian shook his head.

“I’m afraid not, sir. The War interfered with that. Still, I’ve no doubt I shall find an opening after giving myself time to look around.”

“Well, don’t let Pam starve,” said Lord Bramley. “That is to say don’t let her starve more than we’re all doing on rationed food. There’s one comfort for you young people. The Labour Government won’t let you spend too much. Shortages are the order of the day. Nothing in the shops, everything for export.”

“Quite the wrong policy,” said Julian. “It drives people to the Black Market. It takes away the incentive to earn. The home market is very important, don’t you think?”

Lord Bramley's keen eyes glinted at him.

"Your father wouldn't agree with that."

"Oh, my father and I don't see eye to eye," said Julian. "I've no use for Socialism. I don't like the dead level of mediocrity. I'm a bit of an adventurer, as I don't mind admitting."

Lord Bramley took another look at his future son-in-law.

"That's all right. The Elizabethan spirit, eh? The spirit which founded an Empire which we're now handing away, but of course some types of adventurers end up at the Old Bailey."

Julian gave a loud laugh.

"Oh, one has to be careful. One has to know the law."

"Tell me about Germany," said Pamela's father. "Tell me about the Allied Control. Are we doing any good out there? What do you make of things?"

Julian had lost his sense of inferiority. In answer to questions he gave a fairly detailed picture of the economic situation in Germany. It was not a bright picture. It was critical of many things done or failed to be done by the Allied Control. He ridiculed some of the official types out there but admitted the difficulties of the problem and thought our general policy had been wrong from the start, particularly with regard to de-nazification. Everybody was a Nazi—if he remained outside a concentration camp. We ought to have accepted that fact instead of putting all the best brains behind barbed wire.

Lord Bramley listened attentively. Once or twice he groaned. Several times he pulled one long hair among the white hairs of his right eyebrow which was a little trick of his when deep in thought.

Presently after half an hour Pamela touched Julian's arm.

"Come along, Julian! We've got to get married, you know. Lots to do yet."

In the hall while Julian was getting into his coat she slipped back to embrace her father.

"Daddy, what do you think of him?"

"A very smart young fellow," said her father. "Extremely good-looking. I believe your mother might fall for him one day."

Pamela gave a little squeal of laughter.

"That would be wonderful."

CHAPTER XVI

Julian spent the night before his wedding in his father's flat opposite Battersea Park. That perhaps was a mistake as he was unaccustomably nervy and irritable, and after supper had an argument with his father which led to something like a painful scene. He wished he hadn't come home for convenience sake but he wanted a room in which to leave his kit while on his honeymoon. Pam had taken a flat—no more than three rooms—in a mews near Sloane Square, but it wouldn't be ready for them until they came back. Now he had to suffer a family cross-examination and a good deal of cheek from his sister Marjorie who had grown from a long-legged child, as he had last seen her, into an impertinent young hussy, so he thought, while his mother fussed round him and his father made heavy weather.

Marjorie was exasperating and from the start adopted a satirical attitude which he disliked.

"I'm afraid we're going to lose you, dear brother," she said not long after her first greeting when she had given him a cheek to kiss. "You will abandon your humble family for more exalted circles entirely populated by Earls, Viscounts, Barons and their pampered offspring."

Julian laughed at that. It wasn't too bad as an opening gambit.

"I shan't get a look in with that crowd. My future mother-in-law thinks I'm disgracing her noble family."

"Oh, you'll sneak in somehow," said Marjorie. "After the first shock they'll take you into their homes and hearts. You have a very ingratiating manner and after all you have ratted from the Labour crowd. They'll take that as a sign of grace."

"I don't like that word 'ratting'," said Julian. "I'm not alone in thinking that Socialism is all bunk."

"No, you're not alone, dear brother. All the Nobs with vested interests, all the snobs with their Oxford accent, agree with you, I'm sure. It's nice for you to join them although Dad does happen to be a Labour member. Oh, you'll climb the social ladder all right."

Before the end of the afternoon when she had continued this form of wit—very cheap he thought—he lost his temper.

“Shut up, you brat! If I have any more cheek from you I’ll put you across my knee and give you a spanking.”

“Oh boy!” answered Marjorie scornfully. “I’d like to see you do it.”

“Don’t be so provoking, dearie,” said Mrs. Inchbold nervously. “You haven’t said a kind word to Julian since he’s been home. I can’t think what’s come over you.”

“Surely he can stand a little leg-pulling?” asked Marjorie. “He’s not a sensitive plant, is he?”

“I’m very happy in having him,” said her mother. “It’s not often I’ve had the chance of being with him during these awful years of war and peace. Julian, my love, let me help you with your packing. Are you sure you have everything? Socks, handkerchiefs...?”

“I’d rather do it myself, Mother. I have a particular technique.”

Stephen Inchbold came home earlier than usual from the House. He had paired with one of his political opponents in order to have a talk with Julian on this night before his wedding.

He greeted his son with fair cordiality though with a touch of reserve.

“Glad to see you, Julian. A bit of a stranger, aren’t you?”

“Not my fault,” answered Julian. “Military service, you know.”

“We didn’t see you on your last leave. Your mother felt hurt about it. Still, we won’t go into that. You’re looking fine.”

He was indeed struck by the handsome looks of his son. He had grown more mature and almost startlingly good-looking though he had always been that. But there was a new touch about him, a kind of swagger perhaps, or, more kindly put, a new grace.

‘He reminds me,’ thought Mr. Inchbold, ‘of the missus when she was a girl. He’s got it all from her, though she’s homely now.’

Nothing was said about Julian’s marriage until fairly late when Stephen Inchbold said “Come into my study, Julian.”

Before then Julian had been recounting his experiences in Germany in a somewhat satirical vein.

“It’s like being summoned before the head-master,” said Julian, laughing at this invitation.

“Nothing like that!” answered his father. “But we ought to have a pow-

wow."

Julian shirked discussion about his marriage though he knew it would have to come. He kept the subject at bay by a few light-hearted remarks about his father's political activities and those of his government.

"Not doing too well, your Labour crowd," he said.

"Not doing too badly," answered Stephen Inchbold.

Julian raised his eyebrows and laughed.

"Well, I don't want to be a critic on the domestic hearth but it seems to me they couldn't be doing worse. A fine old mess in Germany, a weak hand in Palestine, a scuttle out of India. As for the situation at home it's pretty desperate, isn't it?"

"Not too good," said his father after a moment's pause. "I don't say it's all rosy. We're paying the price for two World Wars not of our making. World conditions are against us, but we shall get through all right. You can't beat the spirit of our people."

Julian laughed jeeringly.

"That's the stuff to give 'em. Fine old patriotic slogans. But I'm surprised to hear them from you, Dad. It might come from the lips of Colonel Blimp."

Stephen Inchbold coloured up slightly.

"The Labour Party is not lacking in patriotism," he said. "As my son you ought to know that."

"Patriotism and possibly a little graft," said Julian. "Well, I'm not against that. Every bird has a right to feather his own nest. I don't suppose Labour Ministers are any worse at that game than their predecessors."

Stephen Inchbold glared at his son.

"Are you making accusations of dishonesty against the Labour Government?" he asked gruffly.

Julian saw the flash of steel in his father's eyes and climbed down a little.

"No more than is inherent in human nature, Dad. Of course they're all honourable men, as Brutus remarked over the body of Caesar. Let's leave it at that."

Stephen Inchbold breathed hard for a moment.

"Julian," he said, "I don't like your cynicism and I don't like the sneer on

your face. Whatever one may think about the Labour Government, and I'm loyal to it, no one dares breathe a word against its integrity."

"Oh, I don't know," answered Julian carelessly. "I've heard some pretty hot stories about Ministers' wives and mink coats, and about a certain Cabinet Minister who lives luxuriously and stands champagne to his little ladies. I don't blame him, mind you. It's just part of the game but they ought to be a little careful, don't you think?"

Stephen Inchbold struck one fist into the palm of his other hand.

"Lies!" he said. "Filthy scandal. There's not a word of truth in it. Who told you these things?"

"Oh, they go round the mess tables in Berlin. Fellows bring them back from home after a spot of leave."

Stephen Inchbold had that flash of steel in his eyes again which Julian had known of old and didn't like.

"They ought to be ashamed of themselves," he said harshly. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself listening to such scurrilous and childish malignancy. I suppose since you've joined the officer class you take the colour of your surroundings, which seem to be pretty poisonous from some of the things you've been telling us."

"Oh, I'm sorry I gave you a false impression," said Julian. "On the whole they're quite a good crowd—within their lights and their tradition. I take an impartial view of them. Anyhow don't let's have a quarrel about it. This is my last night as a bachelor and I'm feeling a bit strung up."

Stephen Inchbold calmed down. Presently he pushed over an envelope and said, "A wedding gift, Julian. All I can afford."

The envelope was open. Julian slipped out a cheque and gave a quick curious glance at it. It was a cheque for a hundred pounds.

"Devilish good of you, Father," he said. "Thanks a lot."

His father was silent for a few moments. Then he spoke gravely.

"I don't approve of this marriage. It's going out of your class, Julian. It's going to lead to a lot of trouble for you and that nice girl. It's going to make me a laughing stock among my own colleagues. Worse than that, it's going to make you a bit of a charlatan. I hope to God you won't break that girl's heart or let her down, after her faith and trust in you."

It was Julian's turn to colour up hotly.

“You don’t seem to think much of your own son, I must say. Why the devil should I let her down?”

“You’ve let me down,” said Stephen Inchbold. “You’ve turned traitor to all my teaching and to all my influence. I’m afraid for that girl, poor dear. She has a high spirit. She has, I should say, a very fine character.”

“That’s why I’m marrying her,” said Julian. “But you suggest that I have a very low character. Perhaps you’re right. I don’t pretend to be an angel of light or one of the idealists. I take the world as I find it. It’s a damn’ bad world—a jungle. One has to be very foxy to avoid destruction.”

He laughed uneasily and tapped the end of a cigarette on the back of his case in an irritable way.

“You always take up such a high moral attitude,” he said to his father. “I can’t reconcile it with the political game—all those crooks out for power and what they can make.”

Stephen Inchbold’s face flushed with anger, but he spoke with obvious restraint.

“We won’t get on to that line again. It’s your last night at home before your marriage and I don’t wish to say harsh things. Have you finished your packing and all that?”

Late that night he heard his son moving about his bedroom. He seemed restless and sleepless. He was obviously in a nervous state before the wedding. Once or twice he groaned heavily and once gave a laugh which sounded bitter and mirthless.

Mrs. Inchbold was disturbed by the sounds from the next room.

“The poor boy is over-excited,” she said. “He may like to have an aspirin. I’ll take one in to him.”

“Better go to sleep, Mother,” said Stephen Inchbold grumpily. He had a hard day in front of him and needed a good night’s rest.

But Mrs. Inchbold slipped out of bed, put on a dressing-gown, and tapped at her son’s door.

“May I come in, dearie?”

She found him fully dressed. The room was filled with cigarette smoke and many stubs lay on the floor. He seemed to have been burning letters and tearing others up. The room was littered with scraps of paper.

“Can’t you go to sleep, dearie?” asked Mrs. Inchbold. “Do try and get a bit

of rest. Take one of these aspirins."

"I've taken four already," he told her. "My nerves have gone to pieces. I suppose I'm funking this marriage. The ceremony in church and all that. I wish I hadn't agreed to it."

"I'm sure it will pass off very nicely," said his mother soothingly.

"Curse it," said Julian sullenly. "I have to make so many vows and all that nonsense. I shall feel an awful fool standing there as though I believed in that clap-trap."

"It's all very beautiful," said his mother. "It can't do you any harm. It's a lovely service really, and the dear young lady you love will be standing by your side. Now don't smoke another cigarette, dearie. It's so bad for you."

"Oh, that's all right. It steadies me down a bit."

He lit another cigarette but threw it away after a few seconds.

"Go back to bed, Mum," he said. "I'm all right. I'll get a bit of sleep."

"Julian, my dear," said Mrs. Inchbold. "I hope you'll be very happy. And I hope you won't forget the mother who brought you up. I was always on your side when your father was rather harsh with you."

"I know, Mum. I shan't forget."

He kissed her on the forehead and then pushed her gently towards the door.

"Pop into bed again, Mum. You'll have Father after you!"

CHAPTER XVII

BEFORE her wedding day Pamela had had to rush around making many arrangements for her married life. She had bought utility furniture, utility beds, utility blankets, with coupons provided for newly married couples by a Socialist Government. Poor stuff the furniture, she thought, remembering the Queen Anne chairs, the inlaid cabinets, the Persian carpets and rugs in her father's house. Poor stuff—but good enough to make a paradise if married love were there.

The money end of things was made easy for the time being by a handsome cheque from her father which came with a characteristic letter over which she laughed and cried a little.

My dear Pamela [he wrote], *I send you a wedding gift in the enclosed cheque. Would that I could make it ten times that amount but the taxation of a Labour Government—well, it might be worse if the Tories were in power!—is annihilation to people of my sort who have had to pay for two World Wars. We are of course being wiped out. We're all living on our dwindling capital and death duties will complete the process. The old landed gentry, to whom England owes much of its former greatness and glory, are done in. Now the screw is being put on the Middle classes who are getting it in the neck and in due course will be liquidated. All very painful, but perhaps inevitable in the struggle for survival. I tremble to think of what is going to happen now that the country has almost exhausted her reserves of wealth. Unless America comes to our aid pretty soon we may come to know real hunger and privation which has not been our lot so far—and it is not good for a great old nation like ours to be so dependent upon outside help.*

Well, my dear, this is gloomy stuff to write before your wedding day. But this letter carries with it all my blessings to you and all my hopes for your happiness. You will find the latter very independent of poverty or wealth. One can be as happy, I am sure, in a two-roomed flat as in a thirty-roomed house. It depends on spiritual values of which the first is love and the second comradeship and the third confidence in the loyalty and integrity of one's partner, without which the first two essential qualities cannot exist. I liked your Julian and my first impressions of him are not unfavourable.

I must be frank in telling you that your mother is so far irreconcilable to your marriage. This seems to me very unreasonable and old-fashioned at the present time of day. She refuses utterly to come to your wedding in spite of all my attempts at persuasion and she has tried to get me to promise not to do so—under pain of her extreme displeasure. My presence in church, she insists, would be detected immediately by the sleuth-hounds of the Press, and still worse by the photographers. Such publicity would be abhorrent to her and disgraceful, she thinks, to my name. Nevertheless I shall be there—disguised perhaps as a shop steward or the man with the dust cart! God bless you, my darling.

Pamela showed this letter to Julian, kissing it before passing it over to him.

"It's very sporting of him," was Julian's comment. "*Noblesse oblige* and all that!"

He eyed the cheque with admiration.

"That'll come in very handy. We shall need it."

"We must hoard it up for a rainy day," said Pamela.

Julian didn't believe in hoarding. Especially in a time of inflation.

"Better use it while there are still things to buy," he said. "It will bridge the gap nicely until I get a decent job."

It was unfortunate for Pamela that her cousin Betty, whose flat she shared, should be visited by her father and mother, Colonel and Mrs. Faraday, on the eve of the wedding day. It was just before tea-time when Pamela and Betty were on their knees in the little sitting-room packing Pamela's bags for the honeymoon. When the bell rang Betty sprang up with a look of apprehension.

"Gosh! I hope that isn't my honoured parents. They said they were coming up to town this week."

"Oh dear!" exclaimed Pamela, with even more apprehension.

Her mother had told her of Aunt Elizabeth's fury at her engagement to the son of a Labour Member of Parliament.

Betty answered the bell and Pamela, becoming a little white-faced, heard her cousin's greetings, full of forced and false enthusiasm.

"Well now, isn't this splendid! Hullo, Dad, hullo, Mum, how frightfully good of you to come!"

Pamela heard Colonel Faraday's throaty cough and his affectionate answer.

"Couldn't come to town without seeing you, my dear. I hope you haven't got a party of dissolute young people."

"No one but Pamela," said Betty. "She's getting married tomorrow, you know."

There was a sudden silence. It was very freezing to the blood of Pamela.

Colonel Faraday coughed again.

"Perhaps we had better take tea at Harrods, my dear," he suggested.

Aunt Elizabeth did not accept the suggestion.

"I'm sure Betty will give us a cup of tea."

She advanced into the sitting-room with tight lips and steely eyes, and held out two fingers to Pamela.

"We didn't expect to see you here," she said coldly. "But perhaps it's providential. Your uncle and I feel very deeply about this action you contemplate. We should like to rescue you at the last moment from a disgrace into which you may have been trapped."

"Perhaps it would be better to avoid a painful subject," said Colonel Faraday.

"You're a coward," answered Mrs. Faraday scornfully. "Although you did win the V.C. in the First World War you have no moral courage whatever."

"Aunt Elizabeth," Pamela spoke quietly but firmly. "Please don't talk about my private affairs. I know your opinions from Mother. Let's leave it at that if you don't mind."

"I do mind," answered Aunt Elizabeth, sitting squarely on a straight-backed chair and prodding the carpet with the point of her umbrella. "They are not your private affairs. They affect the whole family, the whole nation, and indeed, I may say also the British Empire or such as is left to us by a Labour Government. You are the daughter of a very noble and famous man whose reputation is world-wide. A disgraceful marriage tarnishing his name doesn't belong entirely to your private affairs."

Betty gave a squeal of laughter.

"Mother, you're priceless! You're unbelievable!"

"Hold your tongue, child," said her mother sharply.

She turned to Colonel Faraday who had some look of his brother, though of stouter build.

"I hope you'll support me in this matter. I hope you will tell Pamela that we view her contemplated marriage with dismay and disgust."

Colonel Faraday looked distressed and uncomfortable.

"Well, my dear," he said, "I don't like using strong language. I don't like playing the part of the heavy father or in this case the heavy uncle. Naturally being a Conservative to the bone I deplore her intended marriage with the son of a notorious Labour member. But after all one can't interfere with a question of love and that kind of thing."

"Heaven help me," cried Aunt Elizabeth, "he's let me down again! You haven't the guts of a rabbit, Joseph."

"Mother, you're priceless!" exclaimed Betty again, with a gust of laughter. "You belong to the Tudor period. You ought to have been one of Henry VIII's wives."

"Don't be impertinent, child," said Mrs. Faraday. She poked the carpet with the tip of her umbrella and turned to Pamela and spoke darkly. "How can you enter into alliance with Communists and fellow travellers? I fail to understand it, Pamela."

It was fortunate that Pamela began to see the humorous side of this scene otherwise she would have lost her temper, but she answered with a smile.

"You've got it all wrong, Aunt, really. Julian is nothing like that. He's not even on the Labour side. He has gone over to the Conservatives. He thinks the present government is a bunch of crooks!"

This was a staggering surprise to Aunt Elizabeth. It took her breath away as though she had been hit in the solar plexus. It was a long moment before she spoke again.

"Thank heaven for that. It certainly modifies the situation though it's still most embarrassing to your family and your dear father. Still, it does abate one's acute distress."

"Jolly good show!" exclaimed Colonel Faraday. "A lost sheep come over to the fold. A matter for rejoicing, I think, according to the Scriptures."

"Within reason," said his wife. "With many misgivings and regrets."

"I suggest tea!" cried Betty.

Before leaving Colonel Faraday turned his back to the company and

fumbled in a wallet. Then saying good-bye to Pamela he pressed a little bundle of notes into her hand.

"Buy something pretty," he said in a low voice. "My blessings on you, Pam. Sorry I can't come to the wedding."

Aunt Elizabeth presented Pamela with her cheek.

"My bark is worse than my bite," she said, "but in spite of your future husband having come over to our side—and I'm very glad of it—I can't bring myself to come to your wedding."

"Sorry, Aunt!" said Pamela, not grieving much.

"Publicity would be terrible," said her aunt. "If the *Daily Mirror* gets hold of it, it would be truly frightful."

She shuddered with horror at the thought. Then suddenly she embraced Pamela.

"My poor child!" she cried emotionally. "I hope you'll be very happy with that young man. But don't forget you're marrying his relations too. Try to keep away from them. Keep your faith in the grand old party which has always saved this country."

"Bless my soul!" said Colonel Faraday humorously. "Like the month of March, we came in like lions and go out like lambs."

"You came in like a rabbit," said Aunt Elizabeth, "and go out like a white mouse."

"Mother, you're priceless!" cried Betty, for the third time.

After their departure she went back to the sitting-room and uttered the one word "Gosh!" followed by a gust of laughter.

CHAPTER XVIII

It was a very quiet wedding at twelve o'clock in the morning. Mr. and Mrs. Inchbold with Marjorie were in the church and Julian had an Army friend named Langley who stood by his side as best man. He was a dark, sleek-haired, young man to whom Pamela took an instant dislike when she met him for the first time in the vestry. Lord Bramley, not at all disguised, arrived in a taxi at Betty's flat in time to accompany his daughter to the church. It was not a surprise to Pamela as he had spoken to her on the telephone the previous day and had told her that he had decided to give her away according to tradition, and despite her mother's extreme disapproval. But at the sight of him Pamela's eyes became wet with emotion and she hugged him ardently.

"It's very sporting of you, Father. I should have felt abandoned without you."

"My dear child, I couldn't bear the idea of your going to church alone. All this political vendetta leaves me cold. I've never been one for caste or snobbishness."

He gave her a humorous and admiring survey. She was in an ordinary frock of some light blue stuff with a little hat of the same colour.

"You're looking mighty fine," he told her. "That's a smart frock."

"Utility," she answered with a laugh.

"It's the person inside the clothes that matters," said Lord Bramley, and though he was not thinking of himself it was true that he looked more distinguished than most men in the shabbiest of suits.

"I'm so glad you liked Julian," she said.

Her father pinched her ear.

"He's a good-looking fellow, but I have a grudge against him. All fathers have a grudge against the fellow who takes away a daughter. I was hoping to have you at home for a long spell."

Betty gave a cry. "Time's getting on! We mustn't be late."

"I've kept the taxi waiting," said Lord Bramley. "It's going to cost me a pretty penny."

Julian was waiting in the top pew and stood up when he was nudged by his friend Langley at the arrival of Pamela. He was in a very nervous state after his sleepless night. He had a craving for a cigarette as afterwards he told Pamela. There was a queer look in his eyes, as Langley noticed, a kind of guilty look like a man committing a crime and afraid of a hand on his shoulder. He didn't like this 'religious stuff', as he called it. He was embarrassed perhaps by the presence of his future father-in-law at whom he glanced sideways once or twice nervously.

In the vestry at the signing of the register Lord Bramley gripped Julian's hand and spoke with unusual emotion.

"Take care of Pamela. She's very precious."

There was no reception. The bride and bridegroom drove away from church to Waterloo Station for their honeymoon in the Isle of Wight.

Lord Bramley had already exchanged a few words very civilly with Stephen Inchbold, who introduced him to his wife and daughter.

Now when Julian and Pamela had driven away he turned to the Labour member and gave him a friendly invitation.

"Come and have a bite of lunch with me at the Athenæum."

Stephen Inchbold hesitated and then gave an embarrassed laugh.

"Very good of you, my lord, but I should be out of place in the Athenæum—and my presence might attract the notice of your fellow members."

Lord Bramley laughed good-naturedly.

"Oh, we're not so exclusive as all that. Come along, my dear fellow. We're related now in a way, aren't we?"

"Well, I won't refuse," said Inchbold. "It's an astonishing affair altogether—my boy and your daughter! I still find it unbelievable."

Lord Bramley shook hands with Mrs. Inchbold as if she had been a duchess. That is to say he bent over her hand and gave her his most charming smile.

"You don't mind sparing him for lunch?"

A hot colour swept into Mrs. Inchbold's face because of her shyness and timidity in the presence of this great man who now, by what seemed like a miracle, was her son's father-in-law.

"Only too glad, my lord," she answered hurriedly. "In any case there's

nothing for Stephen to eat. I couldn't queue up this morning because of the wedding."

Marjorie gave a guffaw of laughter.

"Oh, Ma, you shouldn't have let that out. It sounds so common now we're related to the aristocracy."

Lord Bramley smiled at her and held her chin for a moment.

"I expect you're a bundle of mischief," he said. "We must do a show together one night. Are you keen on the ballet?"

"Gosh, yes!" answered Marjorie, looking excited.

"Well, we'll have an evening out if your mother will entrust you to me. I'm old enough to be entrusted with any young female."

"Oh, my lord!" cried Mrs. Inchbold, blushing again. "I'm sure it would be a great honour for Marjorie."

Outside the church Lord Bramley hailed a taxi and took Stephen Inchbold to the Athenæum—that snow-white building recently painted, with its classical frieze and portico on the sunny side of Pall Mall.

Stephen Inchbold who had begun life as an apprentice in the engineering shops of Rugby could not resist a sense of awe at entering this club-house of intellectual distinction, academic scholarship and social superiority. Often had he heard that this was the rendezvous of bishops, dons, professors, and people of prodigiously high brows—all of course, or mostly, deep-dyed in the Conservative tradition of England. He felt very much out of place, as though he had entered the camp of his enemies. He felt as rough and uncouth as when he had first entered Parliament, conscious of his big hands, his lack of elegance, his provincial accent among smooth-voiced and dapper-looking men perfectly at their ease in the House of Commons. He had got over that inferiority complex but it came over him again for a few moments in the Athenæum.

A bishop in gaiters and apron—Inchbold thought it inevitable that he should meet a bishop here—greeted his host with a perky geniality.

"Hullo, Bramley, my dear friend, a charming dinner I had with you the other night. Delightful conversation!"

Lord Bramley gave him a slight tap on the shoulder.

"You're a humbug, Bishop. Why don't you say it was a damn' bad dinner? Nothing but 'shepherd's pie' and not enough of that!"

“Delightful, delightful!” reiterated the Bishop, passing on to the dining-room.

An old gentleman with white whiskers and a shining bald head accosted Lord Bramley in the hall.

“Well, young fellow, why don’t you turn out that terrible Labour Government? *The Times* this morning gave me cold shudders. The Chancellor’s statement froze my blood. I knew we were in a damn’ bad way, but I didn’t realize we were using up our last reserve as fast as all that!”

“The result of two World Wars,” answered Lord Bramley. “Not all the fault of the Labour Government, you know.”

His sense of courtesy induced him to soften this attack upon Stephen Inchbold’s party.

“Bosh!” answered the old gentleman. “We shouldn’t be in this state unless the Socialists had forced the pace with their wild-cat schemes. I’m appalled at the prospect, and you fellows in the House of Lords are much too tame. You’re like a lot of tabby cats, afraid to attack the rats. One of my ancestors——”

He broke off, waved a thin old hand to dismiss the subject and with the toddling footsteps of extreme old age made for the dining-room door.

Lord Bramley smiled at Inchbold.

“One of our great scientists,” he said. “Very prejudiced on political affairs. Come and have a snack.”

The tables were crowded. Two other men sat at the table where Lord Bramley was placed with Stephen Inchbold. Private conversation was prevented. Lord Bramley introduced Inchbold to the two other men.

“Stephen Inchbold, Labour Member of Parliament, you know...Lord Morningdale. Sir Arthur Wynne.”

‘I shan’t be popular,’ thought Stephen Inchbold; ‘if Lord Bramley had brought an orang-outang to the club he couldn’t have done worse. But I must say he’s a brave man as well as being a champion of good manners. The way he shook hands with my Missus was a picture. Talk about *noblesse oblige*....’

The two other men at table smiled at Inchbold and spoke to him politely.

“The Chancellor of the Exchequer,” said Lord Morningdale, “didn’t give us any glad news last night. A very grim statement of affairs. Prices are toppling down on the Stock Exchange this morning.”

“It’s best to know the facts,” answered Inchbold. “Perhaps he overdid the

gloom a bit to impress the T.U.C. It coincides with the Government’s effort to keep wages from rising.”

“I’m afraid he didn’t paint the picture too dark,” said Sir Arthur Wynne. “We’re almost at the end of our reserves. Supposing we can’t buy our food? Supposing we can’t buy raw materials for our industry? What happens then?”

He spoke in rather a challenging voice.

“In that case,” said Inchbold bluntly, “we should all starve and many men would be thrown out of employment. I hope it won’t come to that.”

Lord Bramley intervened.

“You two ghouls are spoiling my lunch, and I didn’t bring my friend here to be cross-examined in the witness-box. Sir Arthur, everybody knows you’re a ruthless devil as a prosecuting counsel. The way you badgered that poor fellow yesterday was shocking. Why shouldn’t he have cut himself when he was shaving? I often do even with a safety razor.”

“He doesn’t seem to have had any motive for the crime,” said Lord Morningdale, forgetting the national state of affairs for the more agreeable subject of murder.

“There are three possible motives,” said Sir Arthur Wynne.

For the next half-hour during lunch he analysed those three possible motives, challenged humorously from time to time by Lord Bramley who said that Wynne was like a psycho-analyst interpreting a dream and making it up as he went along.

“Now for coffee, Inchbold,” he said, rising from the table. He took his guest into the smoking-room where he was accosted again by several members.

“Hullo, Bramley! Fine speech of yours the other evening. It moved me very much. I was distinctly wet about the eyes.”

“What was it about?” asked Lord Bramley. “Had you been eating onions?”

“Nobody could have spoken like you on the Children’s Charter. It was your subject, old man.”

“Very kind of you to say so.”

Another man put his hand on Lord Bramley’s shoulder.

“Why have you dropped those talks on the B.B.C., Bramley? They stirred the whole country and everybody fell in love with you.”

“I’ve got the sack,” said Lord Bramley. “The B.B.C. doesn’t love me any more. And I don’t blame ’em. I’m a back number.”

“The nation needs you,” said a thin-faced, long-nosed man with a high forehead and a perfectly bald head. “We want somebody with a soul to lead us—somebody who can stand above the party arena and give the people a touch of inspiration.”

“My dear fellow, you flatter me,” said Lord Bramley with a laugh. “My soul is very much in need of a spring-clean and my powers of inspiration, never very great, are being overcome by senility and second childhood. Look out for a young fellow in the thirties or forties.”

“They’re not coming along,” answered the long-nosed man.

He raised a hand to Lord Bramley and left the smoking-room where many elderly men were sunk deep in the arm-chairs.

“Who was that?” asked Stephen Inchbold curiously.

“A very remarkable character. Major-General Sir Percival Callender. He has lived most of his army life on the Indian frontier. He knows a deuce of a lot about Oriental theosophy. He believes that spiritual force may overcome physical and material evil.”

“He may be right,” said Inchbold.

Lord Bramley glanced at him sideways with a smile and raised eyebrows.

“Think so? I’m inclined to agree.”

He found two vacant chairs in a far corner and ordered coffee from one of the waiters.

Stephen Inchbold felt ill at ease in spite of Lord Bramley’s civility, almost because of it. He was in the wrong company, he thought. The majority of these people scattered about the big room were enemies of the Labour Party. They hated the Labour Government with a deep, bitter and unreasoning hatred. They were the reactionaries whom from boyhood he had been taught to hate. Why should he be sitting among them? They were beyond doubt the men who throughout the centuries of English history had opposed the liberties of the people, unheld the old penal laws, and grown rich on underpaid labour. Why should he have any truck with them? He was putting himself into a false position. Julian had put him into this ridiculous situation by marrying a girl out of his own class. It was in a way an act of treachery—an alliance with the enemy in time of war. For Labour, war was still going on. The fight for the welfare of the masses against the power of vested interests, privilege of rank,

power of wealth. Besides, damn it, he hated being patronized. He had his own pride and sense of dignity. Lord Bramley, most famous of the Elder statesmen, very likeable no doubt in private life, exquisite in manner, was probably playing a part which came to him almost as second nature—genial condescension to the lower orders, perfectly sure of his own superiority of blood and rank.

Having thought all that Stephen Inchbold had second thoughts.

‘Perhaps I’m unfair. Perhaps I’m too class conscious. Perhaps it’s a kind of unverted snobbishness. This fellow at my side, my son’s father-in-law—ye gods!—doesn’t put on any side. I must admit that. I can’t help liking him. He speaks fair. He doesn’t seem to resent his daughter’s marriage.’

Lord Bramley made a few remarks about Julian.

“A very good-looking lad, your son. No wonder Pamela fell for him.”

“He gets that from his mother,” answered Inchbold. “She was bonny as a young wench.”

He added a few blunt words to avoid any false pose.

“She was a factory girl when I married her. Clocked in at six o’clock every morning foul or fair, with a shawl over her head and wooden clogs. Eighteen shillings a week, and a father out of work with younger children.”

“One of our heroines,” said Lord Bramley. “You must be proud of her.”

“I am.”

“Your daughter Marjorie is a bright-eyed lass. She looked at me as though I were a figure of fun, or one of the wax-works in Madame Tussaud’s.”

“Getting a bit wild,” said Inchbold, “like most young people of today.”

“I’m fond of young people,” said his lordship. “I get on with them. One always can if one treats them on the level.”

It was some time before the inevitable subject came up—the state of the country and the political situation.

“What do you think of it all, Inchbold? Pretty alarming, isn’t it?”

Stephen Inchbold answered cautiously.

“It’s an anxious time, certainly.”

“Do you think we shall get through without catastrophe?”

Stephen Inchbold thought that question out. He wanted to be honest. It was

never easy for him to prevaricate or indulge in false optimism. He wasn't one of the glib sort.

"One can't say yet. It depends on the rank and file of Labour. Whether they will agree not to press for wage increases in return for control of prices and profits. It's asking them a lot."

Lord Bramley nodded.

"I agree. But not too much to save their country. My crowd has made great sacrifices. As well you know we're being wiped out by taxation and we haven't done much squealing."

Stephen Inchbold answered with a kind of sulkiness.

"Your crowd, my lord, has had a long innings. It's the turn of the masses, over-worked and underpaid for a hell of a long time."

His host did not seem to resent these blunt words.

"That's quite true, though I hate the old hostility between classes, Inchbold. We're all in the same boat now, on a very rough sea, just as we were in the War when class distinctions were forgotten a good deal. The menace is just as great now. We need the same comradeship and common sacrifice to save this old country. I don't want the working folk of this country to find suddenly that all their wages are fairy gold, wiped out by the demon of inflation. If that happens we're all sunk. There'll be starvation for all, and mass unemployment. I'm sure you agree, my dear fellow. By the way, you needn't call me 'my lord'."

Stephen Inchbold took a sip of coffee before answering and refused a cigar offered by one of the waiters who came round with a box of Havanas—probably a frightful price.

"The Labour Government," he said, "is taking steps to prevent inflation."

For the first time Lord Bramley allowed himself an implied criticism of the Labour Government, which he softened by a laugh.

"A bit late in the day in my opinion, Inchbold."

Inchbold answered after a moment's pause. "No one could foresee the increasing drain on our reserves by rising prices in the dollar countries."

Lord Bramley shook his head.

"The economists warned us. Fellows like Gerald Jerningham. I'm afraid your leaders were over-optimistic. The ex-Chancellor with a song in his heart maintained an illusion of prosperity which was really a fairy tale. The grim

realities were hidden by food subsidies, the American loan, cheap money, and controlled inflation, and expensive schemes of social legislation not yet paid for. Very unsound, my dear fellow. Spending beyond our income. What did old Micawber say?"

Stephen Inchbold's face flushed with a touch of anger.

"It's very natural for your class to jeer at the Labour Party," he said. "Could the Tories have done any better? I'd like an honest answer to that."

Lord Bramley was not accustomed to having his honesty questioned. He raised his eyebrows slightly—those remarkable white eyebrows which delighted the cartoonists. But there was a glint of humour in the eyes beneath them.

"Broadly speaking, not much better perhaps," he answered. "We should still be faced with appalling conditions—the dollar gap and all the rest of it. But I think we should have been less extravagant and put more trust in private enterprise without all the red tape which strangles initiative."

"You would have had to keep up the controls," said Inchbold. "It's hypocrisy to deny that."

"I don't deny it," answered Lord Bramley. "But fewer controls."

"I disagree," said Inchbold bluntly. "Present conditions are compelling."

Lord Bramley made a little gesture with his long delicately shaped hands as though deprecating argument and denial.

"Inchbold," he said, "I'm getting to be a frightened man. I'm not easily frightened."

Stephen Inchbold shot a glance at him. No, this type of man was not easily frightened. He belonged to a class—the old gentry—which, with all its faults, had never lacked courage. And the whole of Lord Bramley's career as a Tory leader and statesman had proved his moral courage and high spirit—never austere but illumined by a kind of gaiety and gallantry, especially when he was fighting a losing battle.

"Blue funk, my lord?" asked Inchbold with a short laugh.

"Blue funk," agreed Lord Bramley. "Our own situation is alarming enough—we stand on the edge of a yawning pit, very black below and very deep. But the world situation is worse and that bears down upon us too. Germany is a cancerous sore in the heart of Europe. Those people have abandoned hope and are becoming too weak to work. Out of misery may come Communism and

desperation. Russia refuses all co-operation and prepares to exploit European misery by extending her system and sinister power. Europe is already divided into two irreconcilable *blocs*. Meanwhile the United States is giving a date for the third World War—inevitable they think—the Atomic War."

"I refuse to envisage that," said Stephen Inchbold curtly.

Lord Bramley raised both his hands slightly.

"We all refuse to envisage it," he said, "but we are drifting towards it by a lack of policy and by internal dissensions and party strife."

"What do you want us to do?" asked Stephen Inchbold. "Wherein lies our safety in your opinion?"

Lord Bramley lowered his voice, aware that an old member of his club in an adjoining chair was listening to this conversation.

"We must close our ranks," he said. "We must abandon party conflict, and political slogans, and sham fights on the floor of the House, in the Commons and in the Lords. The country is in danger, as seldom before in history. We must stand together—all the best brains, all the best men."

"Coalition?" asked Stephen Inchbold.

"Something of the sort. A party truce."

"Never!" said Inchbold. "The Labour Government is in power. It will remain in power. We accept the responsibility."

Lord Bramley sighed and then gave a quiet laugh.

"Tremendous responsibility, my dear fellow. Too much for one party. However I dare say I've been boring you. Forgive me."

He rose from his chair and Inchbold followed his example and glanced at the clock. It was time for him to go to the House of Commons.

"I'll get your hat and coat," said his host. "Thanks for coming."

In the hall he held out his hand.

"We shall meet now and then, no doubt. I hope our Romeo and Juliet will have a happy time. They have a right to say 'A plague o' both your houses!' Do you remember—the Montagues and Capulets?"

"I've read a bit of Shakespeare," said Stephen Inchbold with his dry smile. "I've seen it played at the Old Vic."

He hesitated for a moment and gave a gruff laugh.

“I never thought I should find myself in this club. The camp of the enemy.”

“No, no!” answered his host. “Some of our members are very broadminded. Come again.”

‘Never again!’ thought Stephen Inchbold as he went down the steps. ‘Not my cup of tea! Damn their broadmindedness.’

For Lord Bramley himself he had a certain admiration. He was certainly a man of charm. It was difficult to resist his kindness and courtesy. There was something very magnetic about his personality.

At the corner of Pall Mall Stephen Inchbold bought an evening paper and glanced at it as he stood at the corner of Whitehall. On the front page was a heading in black type.

Peer’s Daughter Marries Labour Member’s Son.

So the Press had got hold of it after all.

CHAPTER XIX

Christopher Harington was one of those—millions perhaps—whose eyes were caught by the headline in the evening papers.

Peer's Daughter Marries Labour Member's Son.

He had the paper propped against the coffee-pot when he was dining alone in the little Russian restaurant called the 'Samovar'.

Suddenly he turned white after reading the paragraph below the headline and gave a groan regardless of the other people at the tables. Some of them were startled by this demonstration of agony by a red-headed gentleman. Lady Maggs looked up from a plate of *soupe a l'oignon* and gazed at him through her bi-focal glasses. The little Chinese student at a neighbouring table smiled at him and tittered. Natalia, behind the counter, raised her thin black eyebrows and spoke some words of Russian to her father.

Harington was quite unconscious of having uttered this groan aloud. It had come from the very depths of his soul. So Pamela had married that fellow Julian Inchbold, and the news of it stabbed him. There was a frightful turmoil within him affecting him physically. He felt himself turning green. He felt sick. For a little while he felt dead, or, at least, as though something had died inside him—his heart perhaps. Jealousy, rage, self-pity, a sense of complete bereavement, an utter loneliness, were in conflict within him. All that lasted for some minutes. If he hadn't been in the 'Samovar' he would have smashed things, flung himself against a wall, wept bitterly. Then some other part of his nature called to him and argued with him.

"Love," said this other part of his mind, "is simply filthy egoism if it doesn't desire the happiness of the one beloved."

"How can I desire the happiness of Pamela with that fellow?" he argued with this other voice within him. "It makes me feel sick, the idea of her going to him, caressing him, yielding to him. She was destined for me by God or fate. We were made for each other. We understood each other. We laughed at the same things. We were like two kids together. Life means nothing whatever without her."

The other voice spoke to him again.

"Aren't you behaving like a cad? Why didn't you write to her wishing her

the best of luck? Why didn't you send her something for a wedding gift? Don't you know how to play the game like a gentleman?"

"Bosh!" said the other part of his mind. "Playing the game like a gentleman! What an archaic phrase! There are no gentlemen nowadays. Nobody plays the game. All that went out with Queen Victoria and the First World War."

"All the same," said the other voice, "you had better write to her. You're her closest friend. Friendship means something, doesn't it?"

"Nothing," he argued with that other voice. "Friendship has no relationship with physical and spiritual passion."

"Don't be a cad.... Don't be a cad...."

"Why not?" he asked himself. "I want to behave like a cad. I want to smash things. I want to curse everybody. For two pins I would murder that little Chink who keeps grinning at me."

Self-pity overwhelmed him again. Here he was alone, eating alone, presently, after a good work in North Kensington, going home to his lonely rooms in Belgrave Road. What was the good of anything? The meaning had gone out of life for him.

Not quite. That's the extraordinary thing about life and human psychology. The latter mystery seems to work in separate compartments—torture in one, laughter in another, one chamber for brooding, another for action, one for bitterness or morbid gloom, another for social civility and commonplace details of daily life such as eating, taking an underground train, getting one's change, shaking hands with friends.

So it was that not a soul noticed anything wrong with Kit Harington that evening when he took a taxi to a northern district of London to speak on behalf of his friend Kirkwood, the Conservative candidate in a coming by-election.

Kirkwood, not yet on the platform of the hall hired for election purposes, wrung him warmly by the hand.

"Jolly good of you to come, Kit. I'm feeling very n-n-nervous."

"What about?" asked Harington, grinning at this hearty-looking young man who had been a rowing blue at Oxford and didn't seem to have a nerve in his body, apart from a tendency to stutter.

"I'm no p-p-public speaker, and there's going to be a row tonight. There's a bunch of Communists at the end of the hall, and another bunch of Labour

laddies. They’re out for trouble.”

Harington forgot the dull ache in the region of his heart.

“It ought to be amusing,” he said with a laugh. “Give ’em hell if they start trouble.”

He hoped they would start a bit of trouble. He felt in a mood for it. He would like a good scrap against heavy odds.

Trouble began soon. It was when Kirkwood was indicting the Labour Government for lack of foresight regarding national finance, for indulging in expensive schemes—fairy-tale schemes—for social reform, when the country was facing bankruptcy, and for playing a weak hand in Palestine and other parts of the world.

He was a poor, ponderous speaker, with that slight stutter. Harington sitting on the platform with him could not help thinking that this friend of his—a first-class rowing man—would not enrich the intellectual reserves of the House of Commons.

He was obviously disconcerted when a raucous voice from the body of the hall shouted out:

“Why do you come here and tell a lot of lies? Do you think we don’t know the Tories’ record of domestic tyranny and international blackmail?”

These questions were greeted with a storm of cheering from the groups surrounding the questioner, mostly young men and girls.

Kirkwood began to stutter badly.

“I d-d-d-dislike being called a l-l-liar,” he answered. “I-I-I——”

This stutter provoked the mirth of at least one part of his audience. Harington rose to the rescue.

“With the Chairman’s consent,” he said, “I will take up the cudgels for the Conservative candidate.”

He was greeted by angry shouts.

“Sit down! Who asked you to speak? Shut up, Carrots!”

“My friend, the Conservative candidate,” said Harington in a loud firm voice.

“Sit down! Shut up! Put your head in a gas oven.”

“My friend, the Conservative candidate——” reiterated Harington

unmoved by this clamour.

A girl’s voice rang out. Harington spotted its owner—a young girl who had an excited light in her eyes and a laughing mouth.

“The Conservative candidate had better go home to his Mammy!” she cried. “Labour will walk over him. He’ll lose his deposit, poor lad!”

There was a burst of shrill laughter from the group of young people around her. They looked like students out for a spree.

In her turn she was challenged by a sullen-looking young man with a scarf round his neck instead of a collar.

“The Labour Government is playing into the hands of the Tory reactionaries. Me and my friends speak as Communists. We believe in the Dictatorship of the Proletariat and alliance with Soviet Russia. We Communists of England——”

The girl with the excited eyes thrust out a long arm and one pointing finger.

“You Communists are dirty dogs, conspiring with a foreign Power against the government of this country. A concentration camp is the right place for you.”

“Give her a slosh on the mouth!” shouted another young man close to the Communist speaker.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” shouted Harington, “on behalf of my friend here I ask you to listen to what he has to say! Free speech is our greatest privilege as British citizens. If we deny that all our liberties will have gone. You are all intelligent people.”

“Sit down, Carrots! We’re too intelligent to be fed with that kind of pap. Wait till we take over power in this country.”

“Long live Soviet Russia! Good old Stalin!”

The girl who had made herself heard before was standing on a chair, held round the waist by a good-looking boy in flannel trousers and a sports coat. He held her round the waist, not for amorous dalliance, but to prevent her falling off a chair with uncertain legs.

“My father happens to be a Labour Member of Parliament. You may have heard of him. Stephen Inchbold.”

There was a loud outburst of cheers and boos.

"Good old Steenie!"

"One of the Pink Rats!"

"One of the best..."

"One of the parasites of the Labour Government. His son has just married a peer's daughter. They all go that way."

"A procession to the House of Lords where they change their coats and vote Tory!"

"Down with Bevin and his gang!"

The daughter of Stephen Inchbold laughed derisively.

"Do you know what would happen to you young louts if this country were communized? You'd jolly soon find yourself in barracks and drilled until your feet were sore. Or they'd shove you into the mines, working long hours and on rotten rations."

"Hit her over the jaw!" shouted the sullen-looking Communist boy. "Kick her in the pants!"

There were small groups of Conservatives in the hall. Hitherto they had sat quiet but now some of them added their voices to the din.

"Disgraceful!...Sit down! We came here to listen....Can't you behave yourselves? Do you call yourselves English? Don't you know what fair play is?"

"We're sick of those words 'Fair Play'. We want better wages and more to eat!"

"Shut your Tory mouths! This isn't Mayfair."

"Go and lick Churchill's boots!"

The uproar was now general. Harington tried to speak several times but his voice could not rise above this storm.

He turned round and smiled at the chairman—a mild-looking Oxford don who had come into the arena—this den of wolf cubs—because he had coached Kirkwood as a rowing man.

"Not much chance of a quiet hearing," said Harington, bending down to him.

"Rather distressing," answered the chairman. "I didn't anticipate this."

Kirkwood grabbed Harington's arm and stuttered into his ear.

“Quite hopeless, my dear f-f-fellow.”

“Give it time,” said Harington. “They’ll calm down.”

They calmed down intermittently. Kirkwood was able to make scraps of a carefully prepared speech, but it was interrupted by screams of laughter from a bunch of girls who thought his stutter very comical and by cat-calls and boos when he criticized the Labour Government.

Presently Stephen Inchbold’s daughter stepped on the rickety chair again clasped by her gallant squire. She was making a speech on behalf of Labour with great eloquence and to the delight of her immediate crowd of student-looking youths though nobody a few yards away could hear a word she was saying.

Harington looked at her curiously. Stephen Inchbold’s girl. The sister of Julian Inchbold who had married Pamela. How astonishing that he should see her here tonight! There was spirit in her, a quality of courage, a gay recklessness which he couldn’t help admiring. She was pretty too, with her shock of fair, tousled hair and blue eyes. Just a kid of seventeen or so. This reminder of Pamela hurt him again. By that curious freak of the many-chambered mind he had not thought of his private agony after entering this hall. His interest had been caught and held by the people on the platform and in the audience. Some of them down there, he thought, were a bad crowd. He didn’t like their type of face, their way of speech, their sullen, brutish look. They were the sort of louts he thought who would be good at purges and liquidations of their political opponents if once they had the power—the types who might do a bit of torture to their prisoners. But they were in a minority. The others were just out to make things rowdy as a political lark. Some of those young students were not unattractive, like this girl Inchbold—the sister of Julian, that ‘faun-like creature’ for whom Pamela had fallen. This girl had declared war on the bunch of Communists whom she was deriding. No one paid the slightest attention to what was happening on the platform where Kirkwood was trying desperately to get through his prepared speech. He was on the topic of our foreign policy and charged the Government with cowardice as shown by the state of the Falklands and the Jewish outrage in Jerusalem. So far as the audience was concerned he might have been speaking about the effect of moonshine on the larger lunacy.

There was some trouble in the neighbourhood of the girl Inchbold. The sullen-faced young Communist who had spoken several times was fighting his way towards her through a group of students who were protecting her. He succeeded in breaking through them and deliberately hit the girl across the face with the back of his fist, knocking her off the chair to the stone floor of the

hall. The audience rose to its feet. There was cries of "Shame!" Some of the students crowded round the fallen girl. One of them had her head on his arm.

Harington had seen the blow, the deliberation and brutality of it.

"Swine!" he called out.

He made a jump from the platform and thrust his way through the excited groups until he was close to the young brute who was trying to edge his way towards one of the exits.

"No, you don't!" shouted Harington. "You won't get out until I've clouted you good and hard."

He gave him a slap across the face and then a hit on the jaw.

The girl-basher staggered back and then hit out wildly.

"You'll pay for this!" he shouted. "I've some pals here."

"It's you who are going to pay," said Harington, slapping him this way and that but refraining from a knock-out blow. The fellow was no pugilist. He didn't know how to defend himself. Some of his pals were gathering their strength and made a combined rush at Harington but were tackled by some of the students who were a match for them. There was a general scrum with whirling arms and clenched fists. The rest of the audience stood watching the fight with excited comments. Harington laid his man flat and bent over him.

"Had enough?"

"Yes, for this time. But don't come this way on a dark night. I'll be waiting for you."

Someone had called in the police. The meeting was called off. The Oxford Don made a dignified exit, murmuring, "Disgraceful! Very un-English!"

Kirkwood made his way to Harington.

"Well done!" he said. "You were m-m-marvellous—a regular p-p-p-paladin."

Without stuttering he added an invitation.

"Let's go and have a drink."

"Wait till I've had a look at this kid," said Harington.

He stooped down over Marjorie Inchbold.

"How's she going?" he asked.

The girl answered for herself.

“Quite all right, Mr. Christopher Harington. A bit of a headache—that’s all.”

She looked up at Harington with a friendly smile.

“You’re a high-spirited wench,” said Harington. “How did you know my name?”

“Big type on the posters! It’s easy.”

Harington stooped down and patted her shoulder. “You asked for trouble,” he told her.

Marjorie Inchbold laughed.

“It’s been a great evening. I wouldn’t have missed it for the world.”

Harington raised his hand to her and joined his friend Kirkwood.

“All very amusing!” he remarked.

“All right for you,” answered Kirkwood. “But I have to f-f-face this kind of thing every night for three weeks.”

CHAPTER XX

MARJORIE INCHBOLD's great night, as she called it, was followed by another evening of drama, milder but quite interesting as a study of human nature and political thought in the outer radius of London. She had announced her intention at the breakfast table of doing a spot of canvassing for the Labour candidate in the coming by-election, not saying a word about her previous adventure.

Stephen Inchbold looked up from the *News Chronicle* in which he had been absorbed, after drinking a cup of coffee. The news of course was very unpleasant. It was always very unpleasant nowadays. There had been more killing of British soldiers in Palestine. The debate last night had gone badly for the Government. Many Labour members had been bitterly critical.

"Don't get into trouble, lass," he said. "This by-election is in a bad district. Lots of toughs there."

"I'll be all right, Pa," answered Marjorie brightly. "Do you mind pushing over that marmalade?"

"You're not going alone into that part of London, dearie?" asked Mrs. Inchbold anxiously. "I'm always so worried about you when you stay out late."

Marjorie laughed through a mouthful of bread and marmalade.

"I shall be well attended, Ma. Plenty of knight-errants—or rather knights-errant, as I think it should be according to the King's English."

That was true. Several young men in the biological and geological departments of King's College were eager to take her to the pictures, go hiking with her, or stand her elevenses any time she liked to name. There were several other young men at the London School of Economics, including an Indian who looked like a prince but was, he said, the son of a Parsee merchant, equally desirous of her company at any reasonable cost to themselves. Being a girl with a head firmly screwed on her shoulders she was not excited by this homage of young males. Young males, she thought, were like that; they found it necessary to make a fuss over some girl. She happened to be one of those girls and might as well take advantage of it for social entertainment, free of charge.

The news about Julian’s marriage to Pamela seemed to have been read by everybody and caused quite a sensation in her own crowd. One after another they came up to express their astonishment, or to conceal their sense of class consciousness under a mask of ridicule.

“Peer’s daughter marries Labour member’s son,” chanted a geological student by name of Spink. “How nice for the Labour member! How uplifting to his family! How revealing of Labour mentality eager for alliance with the ancient aristocracy which they have previously denounced as the defenders of privilege and oppressors of the poor!”

“Amazing that it should have happened to Lord Bramley of all people!” said a satirical youth named Peppercorn, who was an ardent student of economics. “The last of the great Imperialists will be a fellow grandfather with an ex-railwayman whose party shudders at the name of Empire!”

“Have you ever seen his lordship?” asked a snub-nosed young man who posed as a Communist. “Does he condescend to shake hands with you or do you have to make a bob-curtsey?”

“He’s going to take me to the ballet,” announced Marjorie with deliberate carelessness of voice.

“Shut up!... Don’t tell lies!... Go and tell that to the horse marines!”

They were utterly staggered by that statement of a girl who sat on the same bench with them, made a lunch, as they did, with a glass of milk and a bun, and could keep her end up in backchat and student slang.

Marjorie was aware that Julian’s marriage had put her up several pegs, but after much of this pretended ridicule and criticism she turned on half a dozen in the canteen.

“You’re all snobs!” she cried. “You crawl at the very mention of a lord. Everything you say is an admission of an inferiority complex as though you belonged to a different kind of clay. You call yourselves Left Wingers. Some of you call yourselves Communists out of swank, but at the mention of a peer you pull your forelocks like your forefathers. If Lord Bramley—my relative by marriage—were to come in now you would all fall over yourselves to touch the hem of his garment or to fawn on him with curved backs.”

The severity of her rebuke was entirely spoilt by that phrase—put in to annoy them—‘my relative by marriage’. It was greeted by gusts of laughter from seven or eight young men.

“Her relative by marriage!... The Right Hon. Lord Bramley, my relative by

marriage!... I'm going with him to the ballet tonight.... His lordship will doubtless dine at Claridges.... My relative by marriage is speaking in the House of Lords tonight. Nobody, of course, will listen to him but he goes on speaking."

They were enjoying themselves vastly.

It was a biological student from King's College, named Jocelyn Duke, in the first phase of study for the medical profession, whom Marjorie chose as her escort for an evening's canvassing on behalf of the Labour candidate in the coming by-election. He had been at the riotous meeting with her, and was the young man who had held her up on the rickety chair.

"No more Joan of Arc business," he said. "I'm for a quiet and peaceful life."

Marjorie grinned at him.

"There's not a meeting this evening but we could have some good fun and learn a lot of useful things if we did a bit of canvassing. It brings one closer into touch with the people."

Jocelyn Duke, who was a square-faced young man with the torso of a pugilist, but shy eyes in the presence of Marjorie, expressed a few doubts.

"I'm perfectly game to go in spite of last evening but I don't know that we shall learn much beyond the sensation of getting a kick in the pants. As for closer contacts with the people it may result in picking up some contagious disease."

"We'll risk it," said Marjorie cheerfully.

They had a meal at a Corner House before setting forth on the Underground for a distant station.

Jocelyn Duke commented upon the impossibility of knowing London in one lifetime.

"I doubt whether anyone knows what's happening in the minds of these inhabitants of the outer belt. They might as well be in darkest Africa or the Falkland Islands. They're the unknown quantity in elections and by-elections."

Marjorie pooh-poohed his argument and offered him a bar of chocolate which he regarded as a munificent gift staggering in its generosity.

"They're like all the others," she told him. "They marry and have two babies. They get their houses from building societies—so much a month for half a lifetime. They furnish on the hire system. The men work in city offices

from nine-thirty to five. They take an hour and a half each way in a crowded train. In the evenings they listen to the wireless and the woes of their wives on the subject of clothing coupons and queues. At ten o'clock they yawn three times. They go to bed."

Jocelyn Duke, medical student, grinned at her and then groaned.

"Ghastly! But when Socialism gets going——"

"Don't try it out on me," said Marjorie. "Keep it for canvassing tonight."

As a canvasser young Duke was far more timid of 'door-bashing' as he called it, than Marjorie, who had a list of addresses from the local agent of the Labour Party which she examined from time to time by torchlight in dark streets. It had been raining and the pavements were wet and a dank mist closed in the light from the lamp-posts which turned the asphalt roadways to a deep ultramarine. One address was in a mews over an old stable converted into a garage.

They went up a rickety staircase and saw a brass knocker on a door painted blue. Marjorie gave a sharp rat-tat-tat. The door was opened by a young woman in scarlet trousers and a yellow shirt. She was smoking a cigarette through a long holder.

"Good evening," said Marjorie brightly.

The young woman stared at her suspiciously.

"I don't know you," she said. "What do you want?"

"My friend and I are canvassing on behalf of the Labour candidate," said Marjorie.

The young woman raised her eyebrows, and smiled with scarlet lips. "Waste of time here," she said. "We're all Communists."

"Well, let's have a talk about it," said Marjorie. "I met one last night but our conversation was brief." She did not say that he had hit her on the face with his fist.

A young man in corduroys and a blue shirt sloped to the door. He was in bad need of a haircut and a black lock hung over his forehead.

"What's it all about?" he asked, staring at Marjorie and Jocelyn.

"Canvassing for the Labour crowd!" answered the young woman. She gave a high-pitched laugh as though in the presence of something very ridiculous.

"Cripes!" said the young man.

“Well, you can come in if you like,” said the scarlet-trousered lady. “Is a drop of gin any good to you? It’s a filthy night.”

“It sounds most attractive,” said Jocelyn in his polite and timid style. For Marjorie’s sake he was slightly apprehensive of entering this lair of Communists. He hoped there wouldn’t be any more jaw-bashing.

They were led into a big, bare room in which were several other young men and women. One of the men was modelling a small figure. His hands were covered with wet clay and a cigarette dangled from his mouth as he turned his head to stare at the visitors. On a big easel at the end of the room was something which dimly suggested the portrait of a human being in the last stages of decomposition. A girl with short black hair cut like a boy’s was cooking something with a strong smell of onions in a pot on an open fireplace. A girl lay on the floor with her head on a cushion and two young men were squatting on the floor playing dominoes.

Marjorie introduced herself.

“My name is Marjorie Inchbold, my friend is Jocelyn Duke.”

“Very superior names,” was the comment of the young man in corduroys and a blue shirt. “I’m just Jack Jones. This female is Vera Voroshilova. The rest don’t matter.”

“Who says I don’t matter?” asked the modeller in clay. “I’m a hell of a fellow!”

“Are you really all Communists?” asked Marjorie.

“One or two anarchists,” answered Jack Jones. “Why are you two people canvassing for another would-be panderer to *bourgeois* immorality? You look fairly intelligent.”

Jocelyn Duke ventured a defence.

“It’s because we’re fairly intelligent that we support the Labour Government with its programme of social reform and the nationalization of basic industries.”

The young man who called himself Jack Jones thrust back the lock of black hair overhanging his forehead.

“That kind of talk makes me sick,” he said. “Your Labour crowd is as much out of date as the moth-eaten Liberals who have been put into the garbage can. Don’t you know that Communism is the new pattern of life?”

Jocelyn Duke answered nervously but with passionate sincerity.

"Life is what men make it. They can make their own pattern and in this country they don't like the Soviet style with its denial of freedom and police rule."

The modeller of clay gave a hollow-toned laugh.

"Schoolboy stuff!" he said scornfully. "There's no freedom for the masses until the *bourgeoisie* have been liquidated with their bank balances and their smug little minds in smug little houses."

"Exactly," said Mr. Jack Jones, thrusting his hands into the pockets of his corduroy trousers. "This country is essentially *bourgeois*, that is to say essentially stupid and unintelligent with cramped little brains and dirty little moralities. It has no use for Art. It despises Beauty. It worships respectability and the Obvious. It can only be cleansed and liberated by the creed of Communism cutting through all that stuff with a sharp sword of truth and realism."

The girl with the scarlet lips who had been introduced as Vera Voroshilova went over to him and kissed his cheek.

"Beautiful words, comrade!" she cried.

The comrade dabbed his face with a dirty handkerchief to rub off the marks of a lipstick.

Marjorie Inchbold gave a light-hearted laugh.

"You know you're talking nonsense," she said. "It's the sort of muck I hear in the London School of Economics from some of the extreme Leftists. Their eyes go soft at the name of Stalin. They worship that hairy old man, Karl Marx, though they've never read a word he wrote. They get a lot of fun out of the idea of revolution and secret cells and concentration camps for the people they don't like. They're as ignorant as babes unborn about the real state of things in Russia."

This speech by a young girl seemed to startle the group in this big bare room and they stared at her with sullen eyes until one of them laughed. It was a young man who had not previously spoken. He sat on a low stool with a packing-case for a table. On the packing-case was a bit of linoleum which he was cutting with a small knife as though making a design. He was a dark-haired, dark-eyed young man who had not shaved for at least three days.

"Brave words!" he said. "In Russia they would lead to death or the Siberian mines."

"And damn' well deserve it," said Vera Voroshilova.

The young man seated at the packing-case spoke again.

"There's much in what the child says. Most of you are adopting a pose when you call yourselves Communists. Most of you would faint at the sight of a little blood. I and Voroshilova are the only sincere Communists in this gang and my Communism is based on blue funk."

"What the hell do you mean by that?" asked Jack Jones, glaring at the speaker.

"Oh, I'm quite frank about it. If England doesn't join the fellow travellers and the puppet states it's going to be wiped off the map by atom bombs and rockets. Our only chance of survival is to adopt the Soviet system. Personally I want to survive and get on with my etching."

Jocelyn answered him hotly.

"I'd rather be dead than under Soviet rule. That's blank cowardice."

The etcher laughed and shrugged his shoulders.

"I told you it was blue funk. It's also common sense. It's also the highest form of idealism. I not only want my own survival but I want the survival of Canterbury Cathedral, Ely, Winchester and the Albert Memorial which makes me laugh. I don't want to walk alone in the ruins of London, a living but atomized imbecile."

Marjorie Inchbold cut short the conversation by a few words to Jocelyn.

"We must be getting on."

Jocelyn nodded and then made a general salutation to this company of queer types.

"Thanks for giving us a hearing. I'm afraid you won't vote Labour?"

There was a gust of laughter at these words.

"Have a spot of gin before you go," said Jack Jones with less sulkiness.

But they went without gin, having a further programme of door-bashing.

"Very evil," remarked Jocelyn when they were leaving the mews.

"They nattered a lot of nonsense," said Marjorie. "The young man doing linoleum cuts was the most attractive. I thought he was rather gutty."

"Not a worthy citizen," answered Jocelyn.

In other houses there was further political conversation on different lines. In a number of cases there was no need of persuasion.

“Of course we’ll vote Labour! We’re much better off under a Labour government, aren’t we? Better wage-packets even though things cost a lot more and are pretty scarce at that.”

“Do you think we’re going to vote for the Conservatives? Well that would be a joke!”

“Preaching to the converted!” said Jocelyn. “I regard this as waste of time. Let’s go and get a snack somewhere.”

Marjorie was ruthless in her zeal and like most modern girls had more staying power than the male. She dragged Jocelyn Duke into back streets and alleys, interviewing women who stood in their doorways, tripping up flights of stone stairs to rooms in which the wireless was going at full blast, thrusting the Labour candidate’s election address into letter-boxes after ringing bells without an answer.

On the whole their reception was friendly but they had one or two encounters with hostile or critical inhabitants of this quarter. One was a young man living with his wife in a bed-sitting-room. He looked thin and ill, and an old suit hung loosely on him as though made for a bigger man.

He hesitated when he opened the door and heard Marjorie’s patter about canvassing for the Labour candidate.

“I’ll see him in hell first,” he said angrily.

Then he spoke less harshly after staring at his visitors.

“Don’t want to be uncivil, of course. Come in if you like. This is my wife.”

He spoke to a youngish woman who looked worn and anxious. She had a thin face with high cheek-bones and a long, thin neck very white above a shabby black frock.

“These two young people are canvassing for Labour!” said the man. “Comic, isn’t it?”

“You’ve knocked at the wrong door,” answered the wife with a sharp-toned laugh. “We hate Labour.”

“That’s interesting,” said Jocelyn in his shy, formal way. “May we ask why?”

The sick-looking man answered.

“Because Labour doesn’t do a damn’ thing for the white-collar classes and panders to the so-called working classes by lies and humbug.”

“We don’t agree,” said Marjorie, very firmly.

The man smiled at her, seeing how young she was.

“I’m a clerk in a city office,” he said, “after being a sergeant-pilot in the R.A.F. Twenty-two raids over Berlin and most of my pals killed to save this country. What’s the reward? Four pounds ten a week. A bed-sitting-room because one can’t get a flat or house in London. Prices rising all the time. Three and sixpence for a packet of cigarettes. No food unless my wife stands in long queues getting bronchitis. Nothing in the shops. Everything for export. Cuts in electricity. Not enough clothing coupons. Not enough to eat.”

“I challenge those statements,” said Marjorie, who had mugged up her brief.

The young man smiled at her again and made a quick gesture with his right hand as though dismissing this challenge from a child.

“They’re dragging us down to the dirt. After winning the war we’ve lost the peace. Anyone with a bit of sense will clear out of the country.”

Jocelyn put up a defence for Labour, but the man interrupted him.

“What’s the good of talking? Good night to you.”

It was a dismissal.

“A somewhat pathetic pair,” was Jocelyn’s comment. “The female looks in the last stages of T.B. Let’s go and have some eats.”

Not until they had been rebuffed by a Conservative, chaffed by a Liberal, and refused admittance by another Communist, did Marjorie yield to this plea for the flesh-pots. They had sardines on toast and a Welsh rarebit sitting on high stools at a snack bar. Jocelyn paid the bill.

“I’d like to do a nip-in,” he said after this nourishment. “I feel in need of bracing up.”

“No nip-in for me,” said Marjorie, who understood the language of his set. “I’m dog-tired. Still, we’ve had some fun, haven’t we?”

“I agree with Rochefoucauld,” said Jocelyn grimly.

“Don’t know him,” admitted Marjorie. “What did he say?”

“Life would be endurable but for its pleasures.”

He conducted her home to Battersea Park. She refused to let him kiss her.

CHAPTER XXI

Christopher Harington spent a week-end at Church Hampden while Pamela was on her honeymoon. This was due to a meeting with Lord Bramley in Parliament Square.

“Hullo, young fellow,” said his lordship in his genial way. “Haven’t seen you for some time.”

“No,” said Harington. “How’s her ladyship?”

Lord Bramley smiled and then gave a laugh.

“Very peeved with all this publicity about Pamela’s marriage. I’m bound to say the newspapers have made the most of it and I get no end of chaff from my fellow peers. Some of them in fact are scandalized.”

Harington was silent. Any mention of Pamela opened his wound. Perhaps Lord Bramley was aware of that for he gripped Harington’s arm for a moment and said, “Sorry about Pamela for your sake. Come and spend a week-end at Church Hampden. Nigel would like to have a talk with you. So would I.”

Harington hesitated for a moment. For him Church Hampden would be haunted by memories of Pamela. They had had merry times there, teasing each other like Beatrice and Benedick. His father had been the Vicar of Church Hampden until he was made Archdeacon of Bath and Wells. As boy and girl he and Pamela had ridden ponies together, gone rat-hunting in the barns, picking the first primroses in the woods, playing hide and seek in the thickets below the garden. Could he bear a week-end at Church Hampden?

After that momentary hesitation he accepted and said: “Thanks, I’d like to come. This Friday?”

“Excellent!” said Lord Bramley. “I’ll send the car for you at Ashleigh Station. Better come by the 3.45. Quite a good train.”

“Thanks. I’ll do that.”

“Good man!”

It was when he was in the 3.45 on the following Friday that Harington regretted having accepted this invitation and wondered why he had done so. He supposed it must have been an instinct of masochism—self-torture—for the sake of sentimental misery. He had tried to put Pamela out of his mind and

heart. Now he was going to her old home where every stick of furniture would remind him of her.

“Damn’ silly!” he said aloud in a third-class railway carriage where he had flung himself and his bag opposite a naval-looking man.

“I agree,” said the naval-looking man, with a grin. “Everything is damn’ silly nowadays.”

“Sorry,” said Harington, “I was babbling to myself.”

“That’s all right, I often do it.”

No further conversation passed as the naval-looking man settled down for a sleep.

After the mild winter, with a breath of spring deceiving birds and plants, a cold spell had set in, and the countryside was white under snow which lay on the roofs of barns and cottages and spread an ermine mantle across the fields. The trees were etched blackly against this white world, except where the wind had blown the snow against leaning trunks and clung to the bigger branches. The roads were a bit skiddy and Lord Bramley’s car slithered round almost in full circle after braking to avoid a farm cart coming unexpectedly out of a gate.

“Sorry, sir,” said Lord Bramley’s chauffeur who was also his last remaining gardener. “These roads are ice-bound under the snow. Not good without chains.”

“My nerves are pretty good,” said Harington. As a matter of fact they were pretty bad, not because of icy road surfaces, but because of this approach to Pamela’s old home and a queer unmanly desire to weep at least within himself, though no tears would fill his eyes.

‘This cursed self-pity!’ he thought. ‘It’s a form of weakness. I must kill it inside myself. I thought I was made of stronger stuff. I didn’t think I was such a maudlin egoist.’

He showed no signs of that when he arrived at Church Hampden. He could at least claim that he didn’t wear his heart on his sleeve. He put on a good face to Lady Bramley though she patted his hand and called him ‘dear boy!’ with a note of sympathy which he knew referred to Pamela’s desertion of him.

The old house was bitterly cold as no fuel could be spared for central heating.

“We’re all freezing to death,” said her ladyship whose nose had certainly gone a bluish red. “The Labour Government of course will be delighted when

we're stone dead. It's a good way of liquidating the gentry and middle classes whom they hate so much. Doubtless the Minister of Fuel, warming his backside at a big fire in his palatial office, chuckles to himself at the thought of our misery. 'That'll teach 'em', I can hear him saying. 'Pneumonia is a quick way of getting rid of the old reactionaries, blast 'em!' "

Harington laughed at this dramatic fantasy.

"I know the present Minister of Fuel. He's a very decent fellow who wants to keep us all as warm as possible."

Lady Bramley glared at him fiercely for a moment.

"Now look here, Kit," she said. "Don't you come here and defend the Labour Government. I won't stand for it. I'll pack you off with a flea in your ear."

Harington took her rebuke humorously.

"I sit on the other side of the House," he reminded her. "I ask very awkward questions. So far I obey the crack of the Conservative whips."

She did not notice that reservation of 'so far'. Owing to certain ideas of his own he was not at all sure that he would continue to obey the Conservative whips. He was putting out a pamphlet and enlisting support for a new plan of action which would displease them a good deal.

His answer mollified her.

"Don't weaken!" she said. "Keep the old flag flying."

Henriette came into the room blowing into her clasped hands.

"*Ciel!*" she cried. "I die of cold."

"Warm your toes at the electric fire," said Lady Bramley. "It throws out a little heat, but of course we're all bound to get pneumonia."

"*C'est idiot!*" cried Henriette in an agonized voice.

"What is *idiot*?" asked Harington whom she had greeted with a nod of recognition and the faintest smile.

"This little fire in this big room," she answered. "It's like burning a match in a cathedral to keep oneself warm. The English people are like Eskimos."

"No abuse of the English, please," said Lady Bramley. "We don't tolerate a French critic on the hearth. A cup of tea will warm us up. Here comes Meggs with the tea-tray."

Henriette, on her knees before a little electric fire, turned her head to speak to Harington.

“In England that is the magic for any misfortune. A cup of tea when one’s too hot, a cup of tea when one’s too cold, a cup of tea when one’s heart is broken.”

Harington answered her with a laugh.

“I can do with a cup of tea myself, here and now. How’s Nigel?”

“Nigel,” said Henriette, “goes on with his weaving in which I am not amused.”

Nigel came down to tea with the aid of his sticks.

“I thought I smelt toasted crumpets,” he said, “was that a dream or an illusion?”

“A reality!” said Lady Bramley with a little triumph in her voice. “One of my W.I. women queued up for them in Ashleigh this morning and brought them round this afternoon. I must say I think it most good of her.”

“God bless the Women’s Institute,” said Nigel. “May it flourish for ever. Henriette, my darling, let somebody else feel the warmth of that fire. My work-shop is like an ice-box.”

“I’m cold,” said Henriette. “Unless I get some warmth in my body my little white soul will fly away and join the snowflakes.”

On her knees she kept her place well in front of the fire until Lord Bramley’s secretary, Robin Melville, came into the room in his quiet shy way. Then she moved to one side, still on her knees, and showed some consideration for another mortal.

“Come and toast yourself,” she said. “You look like a frozen bird.”

It would have meant kneeling by her side and he shirked that proximity.

“Oh, thanks. I’m perfectly warm.”

Harington smiled to himself.

The poor devil looked blue to the lips with cold.

“Where’s his lordship?” asked Lady Bramley looking at Melville.

That young man answered after a moment’s hesitation as though afraid of giving away a diplomatic secret.

“He went out for a walk.”

“In this weather?” exclaimed Lady Bramley. “The man’s mad.”

“He said he won’t want any tea,” added Melville.

Nigel gave a quiet laugh.

“I expect he’s taking tea with a pretty lady. I think I can guess her name.”

For a moment Lady Bramley’s face flushed slightly. Then she smacked Nigel’s hand which rested on the tea-table.

“No scandal about your father. He’s old enough to take tea with anybody, plain or pretty. But I hope he won’t catch his death of cold. Have another crumpet, Kit. It’s about the last food you’ll get in this house!”

Christopher Harington felt a better man after three crumpets, but every now and then he had a pang at the heart because Pamela did not come into the room. She had always come into this room at tea-time. He remembered her in winter lying on the bearskin rug before a log fire and in summer perched on a window-seat with a background of a flower-bordered lawn through the open windows, and a choir of birds in the trees beyond. The house seemed very empty without Pam, very empty of life.

He felt some kind of restraint among the others here, some kind of tension, something watchful and guarded between them. Nigel kept glancing towards his wife with a faint smile about his lips. Henriette kept glancing towards Robin Melville whose eyes avoided hers and looked over now and then at Lady Bramley nervously. Lady Bramley herself went on knitting a jumper with flying needles and tight lips, and sent now and then a wandering glance towards the others. Conversation was trivial though now and then Nigel introduced a serious note and then abruptly changed it.

“France is going rotten again. The Communists are trying to take over power.”

“Not without a revolution,” answered Harington.

“Oh well, I shall get on with my weaving. Henriette, play something.”

Henriette answered fretfully:

“My fingers are numb to the bones. How can I play?”

“Any good soaking them in hot water?” asked Nigel teasingly.

“That is a very silly idea,” answered Henriette, crossly.

“Well, let’s have a game of gin rummy,” suggested Nigel. “It’s better than discussing the downfall of Europe and the doom of humanity.”

“I’m game,” said Harington, anxious to please Nigel for whom he had friendship and pity.

“It is very childish,” said Henriette. “It’s only for babies and Americans.”

Harington laughed at this combination of personalities.

“It’s quite amusing,” he answered. “Let’s have a go. Melville will you join in?”

“With pleasure,” said Melville after a quick glance at Henriette.

“I have a headache,” said Henriette. “And I hate cards. I have always bad luck.”

“Won’t you play for my sake, darling?” asked Nigel, smiling at her with a queer look in his eyes. “Won’t you do something for your English husband?”

“Do you wish me to have a terrible headache?” she asked. “Would that amuse you at all?”

“Not in the least,” answered Nigel. “Well, call off gin rummy. Mother, do you know any juicy village scandal which might amuse us?”

Lady Bramley shook a knitting needle at him.

“I disapprove of scandal. There are poison tongues as well as poison pens. Still, I must say I’m rather shocked about that affair between Mrs. Mildew and the sexton.”

“What affair?” asked Nigel, with sham eagerness. “It sounds very juicy indeed.”

“Oh, you must have heard of it, Nigel. Meggs was telling me the other night.”

“Good old Meggs! The very storehouse of village scandal. Tell us, Mother. Anything to give a little drama to Henriette who finds life so dull in Church Hampden. Henriette, we’re going to hear something lurid, something Zolaesque!”

“I am not interested,” said Henriette, coldly.

Harington was not favourably impressed by Henriette whom he had met only twice before. She seemed to him selfish and heartless. He was sorry for Nigel who needed love and affectionate companionship in his crippled state. Obviously he craved for it. His eyes were always turning towards his wife, smiling but tragic. ‘That girl needs a spanking,’ thought Harington, and then in his fair-minded way always trying to see the other point of view, he felt sorry

for her too. There could be no fun for her in this chilly old house with a mother-in-law who treated her as a child and was very dominating. Henriette had southern blood, the blood of Provence. Probably her physical make-up revolted against the bleakness of the English climate, and her spirit against the grimness of England in time of shortages and austerities.

‘This has the making of tragic mischief,’ thought Harington, the observer. ‘Poor old Nigel and that poor kid!’

Before dinner, when Nigel had gone up to his work-room again and the others had disappeared, Harington had another talk with Lady Bramley.

She looked up from her letter writing at the little Empire-period desk under a standard lamp, and said, “Kit, tell me!”

“Delighted to tell you anything, Lady Bramley, if I happen to know it.”

“Has there been much chit-chat in the House of Commons about Pamela’s unfortunate marriage?”

Harington winced. This was a painful subject to him. He had had to ward off various inquisitive people who knew that he had been on close terms of friendship with the Bramleys.

“A certain amount,” he told her. “The House of Commons smoking-room is the home of gossip about personalities. They were all rather startled by that publicity in the papers. Photographs and big headlines.”

Lady Bramley raised both her hands and gave a little groan.

“It makes me shiver when I think of it. Frank pretends to take it humorously but inwardly I know he shrinks from the scandal and ridicule. I shall never forgive Pamela for disgracing her family name like this. I can say so to you, Kit, because I know how you felt towards her.”

It was the one theme of conversation which Harington shirked above all. He had been a fool to come and lay himself open to it, he thought now. But Lady Bramley’s reproach against Pamela, her unforgiveness, made him go to the side of the defence.

“I don’t blame Pam. She was swept off her feet by a good-looking fellow. Isn’t human nature like that?”

“Not well-bred human nature,” answered Lady Bramley. “Not the human nature of our class and family tradition.”

Harington permitted himself a laugh. It was best to treat the subject that way.

"I seem to remember a great-aunt Faraday who ran off with a groom. Isn't that her portrait up there?"

Lady Bramley coloured at this reminder.

"She was a slut I admit. Perhaps Pam takes after her. A throw-back!"

Harington spoke rather hotly.

"Pam has done nothing to be ashamed of."

Lady Bramley stared at him with astonishment touched with anger.

"Nothing to be ashamed of? Bringing ridicule and shame upon her father's name?"

Harington felt himself getting angry. No one had more cause than himself for deploring Pamela's marriage but it was for quite other reasons.

"My dear Lady Bramley," he said. "There's no shame attached to what Pam has done. All this class stuff is out of date. There was never any sense in it."

"I'm not talking about class," said Lady Bramley. "I'm talking about Pam's alliance with our enemies. Her father-in-law is a Labour member."

Harington's sense of humour reasserted itself. All this was too ridiculous.

"The Prime Minister of this country is a Labour member. The House of Lords has many Labour peers. Among them are men of the highest integrity and patriotism."

"Stuff and nonsense!" cried Lady Bramley. "They're all fellow travellers on the road to Moscow."

It was no use arguing with her. She hated the Labour Government and all its works and was incapable of fair-mindedness on that subject, like many other people embittered by the weakness, poverty and distresses of the country which—Labour Government or no Labour Government—would have to be faced with the same desperate and increasing perils.

She showed the other side of her character, not without kindness, by coming over to him and kissing his cheek.

"My poor boy, I think it's fine of you to defend Pam. I know how much you love her."

"Don't let's talk about it," he said. "I'll go and have a yarn with Nigel."

He went up to Nigel's work-room and found him at his loom and heard the

click-clack of the shuttle which stopped when Nigel looked up and saw him.

“Nice stuff,” said Harington, handling some of the cloth.

Nigel nodded.

“I get a market for it. I’m earning a fair living wage. Anyhow it amuses me. How are things in the great world?”

Harington laughed.

“Pretty ghastly!”

“I shirk looking at the headlines,” said Nigel. “Sitting here alone most of the day one would keep brooding over the general ghastliness unless one fought against it. I’m fighting against it. I’m becoming a mystic.”

He spoke the last words with a grin and put a new plug of tobacco in his pipe.

“Rather outside my line,” said Harington.

“It came to me quite suddenly one day,” said Nigel, “that nothing matters except the mind and the closeness one can get to the all-pervading spirit which is beyond and within the material universe.”

“All that’s beyond me, old man,” said Harington. “I’m a very worldly fellow.”

Nigel nodded.

“I was like that until pain caught hold of me—tearing, grinding, diabolical pain. It came to me that the only way of escape was to liberate the mind from the body. I had to escape from my body by a terrific leap into pure spirit divorced from matter.”

“Did it work?” asked Harington, concealing his scepticism because of pity.

“It worked,” said Nigel, “but only after repeated failures. It happened in this room. I put my mind outside my body after a strangled cry to God. Suddenly I felt suffused with light. This room was filled with a kind of radiance. I no longer felt my body or the pain of it. I had a sense of astonishing—what shall I say?—lightness as though my body had become etherialized. I had a sense of intense joy and beauty. I was in another dimension, as the jargon goes. I was disembodied.”

“Very interesting,” said Harington.

Nigel looked at him and laughed.

“You think I’m mad! Perhaps I am, but it’s quite a pleasant form of madness. It has happened to me several times. It follows the line of other mystical experiences in books I’ve been reading. Anyhow it has killed a lot of pain and it helps me to look at the abominable happenings of the world with a kind of indifference. All these happenings are very temporary according to the clock of eternity. This little life of ours on earth is just a brief moment of agony. Soon we shall all be caught up in that radiance which seemed to come into this room when I was disembodied.”

“I’m afraid that’s beyond me,” said Harington. “I want to make life better here and now. I want to raise the standard of human intelligence. I want to stop another ‘inevitable’ war. I want to make this life worth while.”

“That’s all right,” said Nigel, lighting his pipe again. “But of course it’s a hopeless quest. Civilization is doomed. We’re all going to perish. We shall all be disembodied by atomic weapons. Then we shall be part of the eternal radiance.”

Christopher Harington thrust a hand through his red hair and gave a laughing groan.

“I don’t want to become part of the eternal radiance too soon,” he said, “I don’t want to see the atomized bodies of my fellow mortals. I like my job in the House of Commons. I’m very much interested in planning for a happy world. I’m what the spiritualists call ‘earth-bound’, but then I happen to be alive on this side of the curtain.”

“The other side is more attractive,” said Nigel, as though he had been there.

He looked across at Harington who was in an old arm-chair with his legs stuck out.

“Do you think I’m mad?” he asked, with a smile.

“Good Lord, no!” answered Harington, hastily.

“It’s quite possible that I’m a bit mad,” said Nigel. “One gets queer ideas if one sits alone too much.”

“Doesn’t Henriette keep company with you?” asked Harington.

He could see an uneasy look in Nigel’s eyes.

“I can’t expect her to sit here while I’m working. I should be rather worried about her if I hadn’t entered into this new mysticism. Of course there’s no fun for her here. I suppose you couldn’t take her about a bit—to a theatre now and then, or a lunch in town? I’m tied by these two sticks.”

“Of course!” said Harington, promptly. “Any time she likes to come up.”

“Devilish good of you,” said Nigel.

They talked about other things until dinner and when Harington rose to leave the room Nigel spoke a few words of caution about his mysticism.

“Don’t say anything to the others about all that. It’s my own private insanity.”

“Not a word, my dear fellow.”

“Henriette would jeer at me,” said Nigel.

Harington left the room with a sense of intense pity and also a kind of wonderment. He had known Nigel as a gay-hearted boy, pretty good in the cricket field and as a young flying-officer drinking too much now and then, out for a good time while he could grab it. Now he was a cripple trying to kill pain by mind over matter and by some mystical disembodiment. Perhaps it was the beginning of madness. Or might it be the beginning of some religious experience beyond the range of normal minds? Such things seemed to happen. They were beyond the ken of Christopher Harington, M.P.

CHAPTER XXII

At nine o'clock that evening Harington looked at his wrist-watch.

"Anybody object to the news?" he asked.

Nigel, who had struggled into the drawing-room, answered first.

"Does news matter? Isn't it just one damn' thing after another?"

"One must keep in touch," said Lady Bramley.

Lord Bramley made no answer, being engrossed in a game of cribbage with Henriette whom he had persuaded to play with him.

Harington turned on the wireless. No evening paper came to Church Hampden and he had missed the six o'clock news and felt like Robinson Crusoe cut off from humanity.

There had been a *coup* in Czechoslovakia. The Communists had seized power. President Benes had yielded to pressure over twelve moderate Ministers who had resigned because of the unconstitutional action by the Minister of the Interior and his Communist-controlled police. They had seized the government offices, the radio station, and other key positions. Prague was in their hands.

Harington, always excitable, listened with a look of consternation.

"Frightful," he said. "I smell burning. The fires of hell."

"One for his nob," said Lord Bramley, who had paid no attention to the news, and was enjoying his game of cribbage.

Lady Bramley was busy as usual with her enormous correspondence. She too had ignored the news on the wireless after her remark about keeping in touch. Nigel had deliberately shut his ears to the babble of the outside world. He was reading a play by T. S. Eliot.

Harington became aware that nobody but himself was paying the slightest attention to these words of ill-omen read unemotionally by the B.B.C. announcer. To his quick imagination it was as though a group of people had been condemned to death without listening to the verdict or the judgment. This might mean war. In the end it must mean war. It was a repetition of 1939 when Hitler had invaded Czechoslovakia and seized Prague. That had been the signal

for war. Now the red light showed again. Russia was behind this. The Communists had carried out the orders of the Kremlin. It was their answer to the Marshall Plan for the recovery of Western Europe. Soon there would be no free Europe left.

He switched off the wireless when the news turned to other affairs and went over to the cribbage players.

“May I interrupt the game?” he asked.

“No,” answered Lord Bramley, moving a peg on the board. “Henriette and I are level pegging.”

“The Communists have seized Prague,” said Harington.

“Eh? What’s that?”

“Moscow is in control of Czechoslovakia,” said Harington.

Lord Bramley looked up at him incredulously.

“Who says so?”

“The B.B.C. gives the details. They have a correspondent in Prague. He tells the whole story.”

“Good heavens!” exclaimed his lordship.

He pushed the cribbage board away from him and apologized to Henriette.

“I’m sorry, my dear! I’m afraid you’ll have to excuse me. This is very startling news. Very grave news for all of us, I fear.”

“Those dreadful Russians!” cried Lady Bramley. “Is there no stopping them?”

She thrust her letters on one side.

“Frank,” she said, looking at her husband. “What does it mean? Those people come creeping on like lice devouring the whole of Europe, poisoning all truth, liquidating all right-minded people. Aren’t you going to do something about it?”

Lord Bramley smiled at her and shook his head.

“Nothing I can do about it, my dear!”

“This miserable government,” cried Lady Bramley. “They’ve demobbed the Army, and scrapped the Navy. They can’t say ‘bo’ to a goose.”

“This is a war without guns,” said Lord Bramley. “It’s a cold war and

Russia is winning all along the line by its deadly technique. I don't know the answer to it."

"There is no answer," said Henriette, peeved because her game of cribbage had been stopped. "It is the new pattern of life. I have said so before. We shall all be communized. I shall have to work in a factory with my hair cut short. I shall be a communized woman making babies for the State."

"Hold your tongue, child!" said Lady Bramley sharply.

Nigel said something in a quiet voice looking up from the play by T. S. Eliot.

"A war of ideas can only be fought by spiritual force."

"What's to be done, sir?" asked Harington, looking at Lord Bramley. "How can we defend ourselves? Is there still time?"

"Only just time," answered the Elder Statesman.

"It's utterly damnable," said Harington excitedly. "It's terrifying."

"Terror won't help," said Lord Bramley. "We've got to keep our heads. We must speed up our actions. But I must get back to my study. I have some notes to make. Join me later, Harington."

Lady Bramley spoke bitterly when her husband had left the room.

"Frank shilly-shallies. This wretched government shilly-shallies. We rush towards disaster like the Gadarene swine."

Further conversation on this subject was prevented by the arrival of the Vicar and his wife who had come to play a game of bridge. Harington and Lady Bramley made a foursome, to the regret of Harington whose attention was not on the game so that he revoked once and failed to answer his partner's lead, thereby incurring the wrath of her ladyship.

"Kit, you're playing like a loony! You've just thrown away a perfectly good trick."

"I apologize. I've no card sense."

"As a rule you play a very good game. Pull yourself together, my good man."

It was with enormous relief that Harington paid over eighteen-pence to the Vicar's wife on the completion of the rubber.

"I had the worst partner in the world," said Lady Bramley, very vexed with him indeed. "Do you mind coppers, Vicar?"

"Any coin of the realm," said the Vicar. "I don't often win."

Nigel had gone to bed. Henriette had slipped out an hour before. Lady Bramley yawned after the departure of her guests.

"A bad game, Kit, but I forgive you. Good night, dear boy."

Harington held the door for her, and after smoking a cigarette, went over to the study. Lord Bramley was still there with his private secretary whom he dismissed with a "Thanks, Melville," when Harington went in.

"How did the game go?" he asked.

"Abominably as far as I'm concerned. I even revoked! I was thinking of this Czech affair. It makes my blood boil, and I confess it gives me cold feet. What do you think, sir?"

Lord Bramley smiled at his red-headed guest.

"Can one have cold feet with boiling blood? Is that physiologically possible? Anyhow, it doesn't help."

He became serious and spoke gravely.

"I don't like the look of things. They could hardly be worse this side of war. If we aren't wise and quick they may lead to war."

"In what way can wisdom work?" asked Harington. "Quick about what?"

"A truce to party strife," said Lord Bramley. "A speeding-up of the Western Union as a counterpoise to Russia. It's the only chance now of saving the last rearguards of European civilization."

Harington spoke rather explosively, quickening the tempo of his words, speaking nervously with an intellectual intensity.

His idea was to form a new middle party, breaking away from the extreme Left and the extreme Right, forming a combination of moderate-minded Socialists, the younger Conservatives who had taken over the Liberal tradition and the liberal-minded instinct of the professional and educated classes which he believed was still strong in the country. They would need inspiring leadership. They would need a leader who had the confidence and affection of the people, and who could arouse their spirit of loyalty in this new time of danger as Winston had done in time of war.

"Is there such a leader?" asked Lord Bramley, with a sceptical smile.

"There is," answered Harington, whose red hair caught the light of a standard lamp close to him so that his head looked on fire with burning

thoughts.

"He is in this room. I am appealing to him. I ask you, sir, to consider this idea very seriously for England's sake, for the leadership we could still give to the world."

Lord Bramley's steel-grey eyes glinted and there was a smile on his lips as he listened to Harington's excited words.

"My dear fellow," he answered, "you think too much of me. I'm a back number. But I must say it's very curious that you should say these things. The same idea has been put to me by another friend of mine—a very important friend."

He did not tell Christopher Harington that it was a lady named Mrs. Bosanquet who had made the same suggestion with very persuasive words. That very afternoon she had talked to him on those lines again, urging him to become the leader of a new party, pleading with him to give a call to the country in time of danger.

"Harington," he said presently, "now is not the time to form a new party even if that had possibilities later on. We have no time for a new political campaign which would put everything into the melting-pot. We need a political truce and, if possible—things are working that way—a coalition in time of national emergency never greater. When next I speak in the House of Lords that will be my text and my appeal."

They stayed up talking for another hour until it was nearly midnight—this young hot-headed politician burning with excitable ideas, and this Elder Statesman who had held high office many times but was gracious and tolerant to a young back-bencher.

"Time for bed, young fellow!" he said at last.

He switched off the lights in his study, said "Good night," and retired to rest.

Harington was still wakeful and suddenly felt the pangs of hunger. It was a good many hours since a somewhat sketchy dinner. He wondered if he could find some bread and cheese in the larder. He found his way to the kitchen with its stone floor and white-washed walls going a bit mouldy in this old Georgian house. The larder was beyond and he found some cheese and a loaf of bread. More than once he had raided this larder with Pamela after returning late from some party in the neighbourhood. This memory was painful to him but now so strange is the make-up of man—even sentimental man—that it didn't spoil his appetite.

A curious thing happened when he swept some crumbs from a deal table and went into the hall. A light was coming from the study door which was slightly open. He could have sworn that Lord Bramley had switched off all the lights. Then he heard voices murmuring. One was a woman’s voice. By its accent he knew that it was Henriette’s.

Very clearly he heard her words as he paused for a moment outside the door.

“Don’t look so alarmed, my poor Robin. You are always so timid, so scared. Does not my love give you a little courage?”

“I must leave,” answered a man’s voice in low tones. “I daren’t stay any longer. This situation is frightful.”

Harington turned away quickly and quietly and crept upstairs. He had heard too much. The man was Robin Melville, that quiet, shy-looking fellow who seemed to eliminate himself even if he were in the room with the others, the slave of a hard taskmaster, a shadow of concealed personality.

‘Good lord!’ thought Harington, as he went into his own room. ‘That explains a good deal.... Poor old Nigel!’

CHAPTER XXIII

Julian and Pamela settled down in their flat after the honeymoon which for Pamela had been deliciously happy, apart from a few slight shadows which crept into her mind now and then but were dispelled quickly by Julian's laughter and her own. They were lovers' tiffs and not serious. He was too much inclined, she thought, to bring her father's name into conversation with chance acquaintances in the hotel where they stayed in Ventnor. "My father-in-law, Lord Bramley...." She taxed him with that.

"Julian, there's no need to tell everybody about Father. Isn't it a bit snobbish?"

Julian was much amused by that.

"No snobbishness in me, Pam! I'm the least snobbish fellow in the world. But I like to see the effect it makes. That supercilious colonel changed his tone completely when I mentioned the fact last night."

"Yes," said Pamela. "But if there's no snobbishness in it why not say my father is a Labour member?"

"That's true," admitted Julian, as though the idea had not come into his mind before. Then he gave an explanation which seemed satisfactory to himself.

"Not believing in the Labour policy it might give a false impression of my political ideas."

"All the same," argued Pamela, "Stephen Inchbold is your father and if any fathers are to be mentioned I don't see why it should be mine."

A very trivial cause of controversy between a young husband and wife. Pamela put it out of her mind and leaned her cheek against Julian's before a coal fire in the private sitting-room until an old gentleman came in to find a library book he had left on one of the tables.

Then there was the disinclination of Julian to discuss their future life, and especially his future job, at all seriously.

"I shall look around for a bit," he said, more than once.

"But, Julian," argued Pam, "you ought to be thinking out a career of some sort. What do you mean by looking around?"

Julian explained his point of view.

"I don't want to get into some blasted city office for the sake of having a job. There's plenty of time. Your father's cheque will keep us going for six months or so."

Pamela looked worried at that remark.

"I don't think we ought to use it for everyday expenses," she said doubtfully. "We ought to regard it as a nest-egg for a rainy day, or, better still, as a little bit of capital. Later on we may want to buy a house or send our children to school."

Julian answered jeeringly.

"False economy, Pam! It's utterly foolish to save in time of inflation which is going to get worse. The money will just wither away or my father's bunch of crooks will grab it when they've got through our last reserves."

Pamela found these words alarming.

"I hope that won't happen! It makes me feel frightened. It takes away all sense of security."

"There's no security, Pam," he told her. "We belong to a generation which is always going to live on the edge of a precipice. I rather like it myself. Security is another name for taking cover in a safe job and sitting in a rut all one's life. I like a bit of adventure and a bit of a gamble. Spend your winnings when you make them. Have a good time while you're young. Isn't that a good philosophy of life?"

Pamela was doubtful on that point.

"Don't a lot of gamblers come to a bad end? Don't they end their days in abject misery?"

Julian laughed in his gay, careless way.

"Oh, they're the fanatics who believe in a system. I believe in watching the odds and then having a bit of a flutter. In other words, make use of your opportunities."

Pamela looked a little anxious for a moment.

"Well, I don't want to be a gambler's wife," she said. "I don't want to become one of those haggard women who crowd round the tables at Monte Carlo!"

"No chance of that," laughed Julian. "Foreign travel is barred by this

Scrooge of a government."

The little shadows which crept into Pamela's mind were due partly to Julian's non-moral attitude towards life, a kind of laughing cynicism which he revealed now and then.

"Life is just a jungle," he told her once. "It's a fight for survival from beasts of prey. The ignorant masses are the chattering monkeys. The cute ones are the foxes. The innocent ones like the deer get torn to pieces by the flesh-eaters."

"I can't accept that as the way of life." Pamela shook her head and looked serious. "The human race has always had its saints and heroes and its good neighbourly people quick to do a kindness to anyone in trouble. I know the folk in Church Hampden. I don't suppose they're perfect but they're not evil. They're nice people with the Christian tradition in their hearts."

"The Christian tradition!" exclaimed Julian, scoffingly. "I used to read about the religious wars in the Middle Ages. 'See how these Christians love one another!' "

"All the same," argued Pamela. "European civilization was based on Christianity—the code of chivalry, the need of charity and pity and love for one's neighbour; all the virtues which made men civilized."

Julian gave a satirical laugh.

"Something must have gone wrong," he answered. "Looking around the world today I don't see those beautiful virtues."

"It's because Christianity has been abandoned," said Pamela.

She put her fingers through his hair as she sat in her favourite attitude, on the floor between his knees. They were in front of the electric fire in their bedroom of the hotel.

"Julian," she said, "I've married a pagan. I sometimes wonder if you have a soul. Did the Greek fauns have souls?"

"Very improbable!" he answered. "But they were good lovers, I believe. Am I a good lover?"

It was impossible to throw any doubt on that. But there was another cause of difference. He had a reluctance to get up at a reasonable hour in the morning when Pamela was as fresh as a lark any time before eight o'clock, at which time she turned on the wireless news.

"For the love of Mike," he growled from the bed. "Can't you let me have a

bit more sleep?"

"Time to get up!" she cried. "Time to make your newly wedded wife a nice cup of tea."

When they were back in their new little home it was she who made tea for her newly wedded husband and cooked his breakfast on a little electric stove in the tiny kitchen. Often he came into the sitting-room in his dressing-gown without having shaved.

"You're a disgrace, Julian!" she told him several times. "It's a nasty habit, not washing and shaving before breakfast. You have no self discipline."

"Don't talk to me of discipline," he answered. "After four years in the Army I hate the word. Do as you like is my motto."

"But what about the other person?" asked Pamela. "The wife, for instance? What you like she may dislike. What she likes you may detest. Shouldn't it be fifty-fifty?"

"Sixty-forty," he answered with a laugh. "The wife must be subordinate to her husband. She must love, cherish, and obey him. Wasn't there something about that in the church service?"

"The church service says nothing about a husband's right to lie abed while his wife cooks the breakfast which he's too lazy to come and eat until it's cold and mucky."

"You shouldn't get up so early," said Julian, in self defence. "Ten o'clock is a good time for breakfast on dull days. Eleven o'clock in weather like this with fog outside the windows."

Lovers' tiffs, not spoiling the happiness of married life in its early days, not leading to any serious quarrel between Pamela and Julian. Always it ended in laughter and a renewal of love, cheek to cheek. Julian had that gift of laughing criticism away, and laughing away a sudden gush of tears in Pamela's eyes which happened now and then when carelessly he hurt her.

He was, she told him more than once, not yet civilized. He coughed without putting a hand to his mouth. He used the butter dish with a dirty knife. He served himself first without seeing if there was enough for her. He handed her a cigarette and then lit his own and forgot hers. She remembered a friend of hers—Christopher Harington—who was so attentive to tiny things like that, the usual behaviour of men among whom she had lived until she married Julian. There was a strain of coarseness in him. A touch of vulgarity of which she became aware though not putting it into those words.

She loved her little flat in Chelsea and was amused by domestic life and the daily round of shopping in the King's Road where she became friendly with the butcher and baker, greengrocer and fishmonger. They liked the look of this young wife who always had a smile for them. It was a new kind of life to Pamela, very different from the days of childhood at Church Hampden with people to wait on her hand and foot. It was very different even from Army life in wartime and Occupied Germany afterwards. Now the only help she had was Mrs. Vokes who came in for an hour every day to do a bit of cleaning, prolonged at times by her political and social monologues in a Cockney accent; or by long accounts of her own ailments as a younger woman and the horrible diseases which had overtaken her friends.

She was a little woman with bright beady eyes and thin wisps of grey hair. Her Cockney sense of humour was irrepressible and broke out into cackles of shrill laughter. For the Labour Government she had nothing but contempt, being a staunch Conservative, very loyal to the old traditions.

"Them Labour upstarts make me vomit," she told Pamela. "They start by voting themselves bigger wages, sending their pals into the 'Ouse of Lords and behaving like a lot of little 'Itlers in making laws which drive one scranny. They can't even speak the King's English and drop their aitches in a most 'orrible way. As for that man who wanted to cut down the income of Princess Elizabeth, I'd like to put 'im across my knee and spank 'im with a boot brush! You know, dearie, this country is being dragged down to ruin by a lot of parricides and spivs. It's a 'norrible outlook for poor old England. If it weren't for dear old Churchill I don't know where we should be."

"Do you mind cleaning out the kitchen this morning, Mrs. Vokes?" said Pamela, interrupting this particular monologue.

Mrs. Vokes ignored this reference to the kitchen. Her mind was on higher things.

" 'Anding away India is what I can't forgive 'em. Queen Victoria would 'ave turned in 'er grave, poor dear. If my poor 'usband 'ad 'ad a grave 'e would have turned in 'is, 'aving been a regular soldier on the North-West Frontier before I married 'im."

"Hasn't he got a grave?" asked Pamela.

"Lor' bless you no! Blown to bits in the Blitz. We only found the buckles of 'is braces—such a fine man too though not much taller than myself. The Blitz was a blessing in a way as 'e was suffering simply awful from varicose veins and an ulcerated stummick due to drink. 'E drank up everything, poor old dear. That's why I 'ave to go out charing."

“If you could clean out the kitchen cupboard.”

Between her monologues Mrs. Vokes was a rapid worker with a quick eye for dirt and dust.

After the first month or two of married life Julian generally went out at eleven o’clock and remained away until after tea-time. He was, he said, having a look round with a view to a good job, or possible opportunities of making a bit. All that was very vague and he was reticent when Pamela questioned him.

“Any job in sight, darling?”

“Not yet. No hurry, of course. I made a few useful contacts today. Jemmy Bracknell introduced me to a bunch of fellows in the city who seem to be on a good thing. They may let me in on the ground floor.”

“What kind of business?” asked Pamela.

Julian laughed at her curiosity.

“Every kind of business. What you might call general merchandise. That is to say buying and selling. That’s what business is!”

He changed the subject to what he thought was a pleasanter one.

“Let’s go out to dinner tonight—the Savoy grill. After that I’ll take you to the cabaret in Dean Street. Some of my crowd will be there.”

“Can we afford it?” asked Pamela, rather anxiously.

“Yes, why not?”

“Aren’t you rather extravagant, darling? I mean we ought to economize until you get a job.”

“Oh, I made a bit yesterday,” he told her. “Quite a little packet. We’ll blow some of it tonight.”

“How did you make it?” asked Pamela. “And why didn’t you tell me before?”

“Oh, it was only a bit on the side. I went in with some of the fellows on a small deal in cosmetics. We sold them at a profit. My share didn’t amount to much. About fifty quid.”

“Fifty pounds!” exclaimed Pamela. “I call that marvellous!”

“Not so bad,” he admitted. “Just a flutter.”

“Don’t let’s go to that cabaret,” she pleaded a little later. “It doesn’t amuse me really. I don’t like the people there. Let’s stay at home and listen to the

wireless. Let's enjoy our own little paradise."

"I promised to go," said Julian. "It's these social contacts which put one on to good things. Most business is done like that."

For Julian's sake Pamela resigned herself to an unpleasant evening. For his sake she had to endure too many such evenings. She didn't like his friends. The men seemed to her common and loud-voiced and dissolute. Their wives smoked too many cigarettes, drank too many cocktails, made up too much, and talked too foolishly. Pamela particularly disliked Julian's most intimate friend, Pierce Langley, who had been best man at his wedding.

It was difficult to say what was wrong with him. He had good manners, spoke well and wasn't noisy like the others. But in Pamela's mind there was something sinister about him. With his black hair and dark eyes he had a foreign look. That was not against him but his eyes, she thought, were shifty and his smiles were insincere and showed too much dazzle of white teeth and his conversation was always cynical and flippant. She detested the way he called her 'dear lady' until—rather too quickly—he called her 'Pam'.

She was annoyed because he always enquired after her father in public company—restaurants and cabarets where she did not want her father's name brought in. Besides Pierce Langley didn't know her father. It was cheek of him, she thought, lo ask after his health or to say how much he admired Lord Bramley's speeches in the House of Lords. Perhaps she was over-sensitive about that. Once she was rather rude to him about it. It was during dinner with four more of Julian's friends, two city men as they called themselves, and their shrill, laughing wives.

"How is his lordship?" asked Langley, during a pause in the conversation.

"Which lordship?" asked Pamela.

"Our Elder Statesman," answered Langley. "One of our historical figures. Your honoured father, the Right Honourable Lord Bramley."

There was a cabaret show going on of half-naked girls. The tables around the dancing floor were tightly wedged together. People close to them could hear what Langley was saying.

Pamela stubbed out a cigarette and looked Langley in the eyes.

"Please leave my father's name alone," she said.

Langley was startled and coloured up for a second and his eyes avoided Pamela's straight look.

Then he smiled and answered politely.

"I apologize. I agree that this is not a place in which to mention famous names."

"Why are we here? This place is disgusting."

She hated the thump-thump of the jazz orchestra, the maddening rhythm of it, the dim, shaded lights, the stench of cigars and cosmetics and the false laughter of the company.

Langley raised his eyebrows and smiled again.

"It's a question of mood," he answered. "Sometimes one feels like this kind of thing. Take the floor with me for the next dance."

She refused and said she was tired, she supposed. She was not tired but her spirit had suddenly revolted against the futility and vulgarity of this place and its expensiveness. Julian was spending too much money. Those drinks which he kept handing round would cost many pounds.

He was having a kind of flirtation with the wife of one of his friends, an artificial blonde with scarlet lips. That was Mrs. Ashton Weeks whose husband was a fat, slug-like young man, with soft podgy hands. Sue, as he called her, was goggle-eyed in the presence of Julian. She gazed at him swooningly and Julian was putting his spell on her and enjoying his power of attraction. Pamela didn't like it. Julian couldn't help it with a pretty woman, it was part of his ego and meant very little, perhaps, but all the same there was a kind of disloyalty in it, a kind of falsity and intellectual immorality.

She spoke to him after he had taken Sue round the dancing floor, when Pamela followed them with her eyes. The woman was lying against Julian with upraised face within an inch of his, gazing at him with cow-like eyes while he smiled down at her. They came back hand in hand.

"Julian," said Pamela, "I'm sick of this. I'm going home."

He was astonished and annoyed.

"Good lord! It's much too early. Have another drink. Isn't Langley going to dance with you?"

"I don't want to dance," said Pamela. "This place gives me a headache. I can't stay here any longer."

Julian spoke to her angrily.

"Oh, that's ridiculous. This is my party. You can't leave my guests in the lurch."

"I'm afraid I shall have to," said Pamela. "I'll go back alone."

She stood up from the table, rather white-faced. It was true about the headache.

"I'll take you back," said Langley, "if Julian will let me."

Julian's mouth hardened.

"I want her to stay," he said. "This isn't playing the game. Pam, have another drink and pull yourself together."

Pamela shook her head. She had made up her mind.

"I can't breathe here. I'm sorry I must go, but I don't want to break up the party. Perhaps you'll get a taxi for me, Julian."

"No, I'm damned if I will," said Julian sulkily. "It's very silly of you, Pam."

"Allow me to get a taxi for you," said Langley.

Pamela felt unwell. She felt rather suffocated. Her face was pale but it was only a question of nerves and temperament.

"So sorry you're feeling chippy," said the blonde Mrs. Ashton Weeks, sympathetically.

The others showed concern at this sudden decision by Pamela. She said good night to them and left the restaurant followed by Pierce Langley.

"I'll see you home," he said when the commissionaire had hailed a cab.

"No," said Pamela firmly. "I'm all right. I prefer to go alone, if you don't mind."

He laughed with a note of vexation—or disappointment.

"I do mind. We might have a pleasant *tête-à-tête*. You and I alone together."

"Good night," she said coldly, getting into the taxi and telling the driver the address.

When she reached her flat she felt a little conscience-stricken. She had had a kind of nerve storm. She ought not to have left Julian in the lurch like that, making a scene before his friends. But she had found that cabaret insufferable. It was a kind of boiling up of boredom and irritability after other evenings of this kind. That blonde woman, Sue Weeks, had disgusted her. But she ought to have had more self control and more tolerance for Julian, who liked this kind

of thing.

She switched on the wireless and found the Third Programme, and sitting on the floor in front of the electric fire listened to some music by Bach and Mozart. It was a spiritual refreshment and a kind of cleansing. This music took her into a world different from that horrible cabaret with its frightful thump-thump of jazz tunes and its overheated atmosphere.

Julian came in late. Pamela was asleep with her head against the sofa. She awakened at the sound of his key in the lock and a lurch he made against the hat stand.

She opened her eyes and said: "Hullo, Julian! What's the time?"

"I don't care a damn about time," he answered sulkily.

There was a kind of thickness in his speech and he sat down heavily in one of the arm-chairs.

"Julian," said Pamela staring at him with a smile, but with reproof in her voice, "I believe you've had too much to drink. I believe you're 'lit up' rather too brightly. I had better make you a cup of coffee."

He had lost his usual gaiety and spoke with smouldering anger.

"I'm damned annoyed with you. You let me down badly. You made a silly scene in front of my friends. What the devil was the matter with you?"

Pamela did not like the line of his mouth nor the hard look in his eyes, nor the drunken way in which he spoke.

'This is not my Greek faun,' she thought.

"I felt unwell," she told him. "And I don't like that yellow-haired lady. She swooned in your arms. It was disgusting. You flirted with her abominably, Julian."

She did not speak angrily but in a matter-of-fact way.

That reference to the yellow-haired lady took the sulkiness out of his eyes and he laughed loudly.

"Cripes! That woman is a pretty slut. Slut of sluts, but very amorous, very enticing!"

"She's a yellow cat," said Pamela, giving a little shudder at the thought of her.

"No," said Julian. "Not a cat, nor even a kitten. She's a pretty slut. Devilish enticing. A juicy Jill."

He laughed again foolishly and seemed pleased with that name for Mrs. Weeks.

"Juicy Jill! I must remember that!"

He yawned heavily, sank further into the arm-chair with his legs stretched out.

"Lord! I'm sleepy!"

He fell deeply asleep while Pamela in the little kitchen was boiling up some coffee. Coming back into the sitting-room she put down the tray and looked at him.

A rush of tears came into her eyes.

She was not particularly prudish. More than once she had drunk too many cocktails and had felt a little unsteady on her feet. But Julian was drunk. Her Greek faun looked coarsened and flushed as he lay back in the chair with his head on one side and his mouth open. She crept out of the room and went to the bedroom and locked the door.

Pamela had time on her hands when Julian was out during the day making 'contacts', as he called it. Being a fresh-air lover and a country-bred girl she went for walks round the parks on fine days and after the short spell of snow and frost there was a kind of summer in March, with blue skies and warm sunshine, warmer than in many an English June. The birds were singing again in bursts of happiness after their frozen silence. The golden cups of crocuses opened to the sun in Hyde Park and Kensington Gardens, and a week or two later daffodils stood tall and lovely in the flower beds. London was touched by magic—a dream city in early morning mists, and then glittering and glamorous under the blue dome transmuting its bricks and plaster into ethereal radiance, giving enchantment to chimney pots and slate roofs.

The Serpentine round which Pamela walked one day reflected this blue sky and caught the glory of the sun. She walked there alone until she met a friend. It was Christopher Harington, who was stretching his legs before a dreary sitting in the House.

He walked with his hat in his hand so that his red hair seemed on fire. He was thinking intensively it seemed, looking down at the gravelled path as he walked, so that he was startled when Pamela spoke to him.

"Hullo, Kit!"

He raised his eyes and they lighted up.

“My dearest Pam!” he exclaimed.

He held her hand and looked into her eyes.

“Are you happy?” he asked.

Pamela avoided a straight answer.

“Happiness is very elusive, isn’t it? But this weather is wonderful and warms one’s blood. Shall we sit down somewhere?”

“That would be enchanting,” he answered. “Over there are some empty chairs.”

They walked across the grass and spoke a few words to each other about trivial things, though not so very trivial because they had to do with the coming out of the daffodils, some of them in the long grass at their feet. They were thinking of one another.

Pamela was glad that he was pleased to meet her and did not look like a Melancholy Jacques. She had missed his friendship. Harington spoke his thoughts aloud, or some of them.

“You’re looking beautiful, Pam! You’re looking fine!”

Pamela laughed at this tribute.

“You were thinking out portentous thoughts when we met. Are they worth more than a penny?”

Christopher Harington answered her laugh.

“Worrying about the state of the world. It becomes a habit. It’s like taking drugs.”

“It’s your job,” she reminded him. “One of our legislators!”

“An utterly futile job,” he said with sudden gloom. “I’d do better if I went down the mines and heaved up some coal. Look, let’s seize these chairs before those brats come.”

They sat on the little green chairs and he flung his hat and stick on the grass and said, “Glory be to the sun!”

He told her about his week-end at Church Hampden and she was glad that he had been down.

“How’s poor Nigel?” she asked.

Harington groaned slightly.

“It makes my heart ache to look at him in spite of his courage. His wife isn’t much of a help to him. Utterly selfish, isn’t she?”

“I’m rather scared about her,” said Pamela.

Harington looked at her curiously.

He had his own reason for being suspicious of Henriette, and alarmed about her for Nigel’s sake.

“What makes you scared?”

Pamela hesitated for a moment and then told him about some conversation she had overheard between Henriette and Robin Melville.

“She was being very naughty. Robin was like a scared rabbit in front of the serpent in the garden.”

“I had the same experience,” said Harington. “It was late at night. They were talking in the study after your father had gone to bed. Henriette was tempting young Melville and he was in a blue funk. I don’t blame him. I don’t even blame Henriette. They’re both caught in a net. Boredom is the very devil. I can quite understand.”

“I can understand,” answered Pamela, “but I can’t approve. Nigel will be badly hurt if Henriette betrays him.”

“He’s watching them,” said Harington. “I believe he knows Henriette’s little game. I think he’s prepared for what might happen.”

“Do you mean she might go off with Robin?”

Harington shrugged his shoulders.

“Go off or keep the boy tied as her captive lover.”

They were both silent for a little while. A nursemaid and some babies passed them, then a soldier with his girl.

Presently Harington broke the silence.

“It’s not for me to talk morality. My only hope is that one day you will get tired of your Greek faun.”

Pamela’s face flushed and she gave a little cry of dismay.

“Kit! I wish you hadn’t said that. It spoils things and it frightens me. I was hoping that we could regain our friendship without foolishness. Can’t you come and see me sometimes, and let me feel safe with you? Can’t you let me sit here today and feel safe with you? I’m rather desperately in need of

friendship just now and your friendship was the best I had."

Harington gave a little groan, and then a laugh.

"I should like to come and see you sometimes but I wouldn't feel safe. I still love you with passion. I should be a liar if I pretended otherwise."

Pamela stretched out her hand and held his for a moment.

"Kit, I'm sorry. And yet I'm glad. Let's call our friendship love if you like. I love you very dearly but without disloyalty to Julian. Can't you love me without disloyalty to yourself, to all that's best in you?"

"No!" he answered. "I just can't, Pam."

"Try. Give it a chance. Don't you believe in the old code?"

"What code?" he asked.

She laughed as though aware that she was saying something very prim and old-fashioned.

"The code of a gentleman. I hate to remind you of it."

She saw the humour in his eyes and he thrust the fingers of his right hand through his shock of carroty hair.

"I'm a red-headed cave-man," he told her. "The code of a gentleman—a Victorian gent, or an eighteenth-century gent—was only a pose which broke down at the first temptation. So it did all through the ages. Was Romeo a gentleman? Or any of Shakespeare's lovers?"

"Sir Thomas More was a gentleman," said Pamela, diving into history and then into fiction. "Don Quixote was a gentleman."

"This is an absurd conversation," said Harington, with a return to his sense of humour. "I'm not Sir Thomas More and I'm not Don Quixote. I'm a poor devil named Christopher Harington, compounded of normal human qualities, some of them shocking bad, some of them good in intention."

She turned the conversation away from love and passion.

"What's going on behind the political front?" she asked. "What are you doing in the House? How are we going to bridge the dollar gap and all that?"

"Do you want those questions answered," he asked, looking at her suspiciously, "or are they just to put me off?"

"I want them answered. I haven't seen Father lately. What's happening behind the scenes?"

“Lots of things!” he told her. “There’s a strain in the Cabinet between the Leftists and the Moderates. There’s a slight tendency for a truce in party strife because of imminent danger at home and abroad. We’re all in a blue funk. We see a yawning gulf only a few yards ahead.”

“Are you trying to do something about it, Kit?” asked Pamela lightly.

He looked at her suspiciously again and then his eyes glinted.

“I’m asking for trouble. I’m writing a screed—almost a book!—advocating a new centre party. I’m working like a dog at it, and I already have the backing of some of the lads with independent views—Tories, Liberals and even a few of the Independent Labour Party. It’s going to be quite a game!”

“You’ll want a big leader,” said Pamela. “Where are you going to find him, Kit?”

Harington glanced sideways at her.

“If the man I want would lead the campaign we should get a big following in the country.”

“Who’s that, Kit?”

“Your father,” he said.

Pamela laughed.

“You’ll never get Daddy to fight a new crusade. He’s not a crusader.”

Harington looked at her, disappointed. She knew more about her father than he did.

“Sure?” he asked.

“Pretty certain. Besides, he’s getting old. Sixty-five, poor dear!”

“That’s juvenile for an Elder Statesman,” said Harington. “Look at Winston!”

“Well, look at him!” answered Pamela. “A bit wheezy, isn’t he? Not so resilient.”

Harington made a gesture as though sweeping away political argument.

“Why do you tempt me to talk shop?” he asked. “I want to talk of you and me.”

“Far less important!” she answered lightly. “A topic to be avoided, Kit. When are we going to get really hungry? Is there going to be a capital levy?”

“Pam, tell me!” said Harington. “Are you happy? Is this marriage of yours any good? Is it going to last? What sort of fellow is that Julian Inchbold? Is there a cloven hoof inside his boot?”

Pamela’s face flushed and she refused to answer these questions.

“You’ve no right to ask such things, Kit. They’re absurd, anyhow. Julian and I have only been married a few months.”

“I know,” said Kit. “But I swear to God I’m thinking more of your happiness than mine. I want you to be happy even if I bleed at the heart.”

“Those are very gentlemanly words!” said Pamela, teasingly. Then she put her hand on his knee and said, “Thanks, Kit.”

He had to go and they walked through the park to Princes Gate, where he took a taxi. On the step of the cab he looked into her eyes and smiled.

“I’ll try to behave like a nice little gentleman,” he said. “Will you come and have lunch with me one day?”

“I should love to.”

She raised her hand to him when he was driven away still carrying his hat so that his red hair glowed inside the cab.

CHAPTER XXIV

Lord Bramley was over-burdened by letters after his speech in the House of Lords of which Harington had said something to Pamela. As he was punctilious in answering all correspondents, even, and indeed particularly the most humble writers, it put extra work on Robin Melville, his private secretary, to whom he dictated his answers. Many of the letters were from fellow peers congratulating him upon the speech which, as some of them said, had deeply impressed them. Others were from old friends with whom he had lost touch during the war years, and of whom he was not quite sure whether they were still in the land of the living. Some of them came to him like ghost letters from old school fellows or men who had served with him, or under him, as long as forty years ago and now seemed to come out of their graves to approve of his words in a time of national crisis.

A good many of these letters were from unknown correspondents—women of no importance but educated and intelligent and desperately anxious about their country and the menace of another war. Others were from women of the working classes, ignorant of spelling and grammar but able to express their thanks in a very touching way for the words he had spoken, calling for a political truce and a national unity in face of grave danger.

One of them was typical of many, though not mis-spelt. It was read out by Robin Melville in Lord Bramley's study.

"*Dear Lord Bramley*,

"*Forgive me for writing to you in your high position. I am just a working woman with two children of six and eight. My husband is a bricklayer after serving in North Africa and Italy during the last war. He came home in a bitter state of mind and voted against Winston Churchill and his party. Now he has joined the Communists and hopes for the time when England will be taken over by Russia. He thinks the working classes will have a better time under the Soviet system. He is very fierce against the Socialists and all other parties. We have hard words about all this because I don't agree with him. I am against this political hatred and class bitterness. I was in service before I married and know that the gentlefolk have their own troubles and are often kindly and generous. When I read your speech—perhaps there was only a bit of it in the paper—I had tears in my eyes. I thought that's what we want—the best men of all parties getting together to save old England and to stop another war. If*

there is to be another war I would rather be dead and have my children dead. So God bless you and may you succeed in your ideas.

"*Yours obediently,*
"*Annie Smith.*

"*P.S.—During the war I often used to listen to you on the wireless and loved your voice and the words you spoke.*"

"I don't think that needs an answer, sir," said Melville in a tired voice.

Lord Bramley glared at him.

"Why not? What the deuce do you mean?"

"It's only a bricklayer's wife."

Lord Bramley frowned heavily.

"That's why I'm going to answer it. It's a very sensible letter. I'm much touched by it. Only a bricklayer's wife? I'd rather write to her than I would to a duchess."

He had already written to three duchesses who called him 'Dear Frank' and expressed their approval of his speech.

One night, when his chief was still answering letters after a heavy day's work on his reminiscences, Melville sighed deeply and made a protest.

"You don't give yourself any rest, sir."

Lord Bramley jerked his head up and answered sharply.

"Why should I? I never have done, and I never will until I'm overtaken by some foul disease of old age."

He glanced over at Melville and smiled under his shaggy eyebrows.

"I expect you mean I'm too hard on a representative of a younger and more delicate generation."

He spoke these words with humorous sarcasm.

"Not at all, sir," answered Melville, who felt thoroughly exhausted.

Lord Bramley looked at the clock on the mantelshelf.

"Better knock off," he said. "That's enough for today. I'll write some personal letters myself—and God help those who have to read them! My handwriting was always indecipherable except by the eye of faith."

“I’m quite ready to stay up longer, sir,” said Melville, looking like a dying man.

“I’m not ready to let you stay up,” said his lordship. “I’m not a slave-driver. Good night to you, my dear fellow!”

He added a few words in a kindly voice.

“Thanks for your toil, Melville. Of course I am a slave-driver. And by the way, that reminds me. I’m going to increase your salary. I can ill afford it, God knows, but I don’t like to see you going around so shabby.”

Melville’s pallid face coloured up because of his constitutional shyness. “It’s extremely kind of you, sir.”

“Will a hundred and fifty extra be any good to you?”

Melville drew a sharp breath and looked disturbed.

“It’s too generous, sir.”

Lord Bramley smiled at him good-naturedly.

“The labourer is worthy of his hire. Get a new suit, if you have enough of those damn’ coupons. Take a friend out to dinner one night and get tight. You’re too damn’ doleful, Melville. I don’t like a doleful fellow at my elbow all the time, though heaven knows the daily news nowadays is enough to take the grin off the Cheshire cat. Well, good night, my dear lad.”

Melville left the study and went upstairs to his bedroom. He was surprised to find the light on and looked terrified when he found Henriette curled up in his only arm-chair. She was in a flowered dressing-gown and a pair of blue silk pyjamas.

“Come in,” she whispered. “Shut the door, Robin.”

“You mustn’t stay here,” he said in a low, frightened voice. “For God’s sake go away.”

She sprang up from the chair, went swiftly to the door, and shut it noiselessly after listening intently for a moment.

“*Mon bien-aimé!*” she said. “*Je suis ici à la disposition.*”

She held out her arms to him with an inviting smile. But he recoiled from her.

“Henriette,” he said in a whisper, “I beg you not to stay here. Her ladyship is in the next room.”

“Snoring!” said Henriette, with a little laugh. “I heard very clearly that she was snoring.”

“Nigel may still be awake,” said Melville. “It’s not yet eleven.”

“He is wide awake,” said Henriette. “He reads some silly old book on mysticism up in his work-shop. We may have a beautiful half-hour together. We may have even a beautiful hour, my little timid one, *mon petit lapin*.”

She came close to him and he put his arms about her and kissed the lips she offered him.

Then suddenly he withdrew himself from her embrace and stood away from her and spoke like a tortured man.

“Why do you tempt me? This love of ours is not good. It makes me feel a traitor. I dare not look Nigel in the eyes. I suffer an agony of self-reproach when I see him watching you with yearning eyes. I suffer like a soul in hell.”

Henriette became white and angry.

“You are a coward,” she told him. “You have no more courage than a white mouse. *C’est idiot!*”

Melville answered miserably, looking at her with tragic eyes.

“No, I have no courage. It’s because I wasn’t made for treachery. This family has been so generous to me. Only tonight Lord Bramley has raised my salary. How can I betray them all?”

Henriette gave a little shrill laugh.

“You are so English, my Robin. The English are afraid of love.”

Melville avoided her eyes and stared down at the carpet.

“Yes, I’m afraid,” he admitted. “I want to be loyal.”

“Loyalty to what, *mon cher*?” asked Henriette. “Loyalty to the *bourgeois* tradition? Loyalty to English Puritanism?”

“Loyalty to friendship,” answered Melville. “Nigel is my friend. If I betray him I shall hate myself.”

“That is because you do not love me,” said Henriette. “It is I who do the loving. It is I who fling myself into your cold and reluctant arms. It is I who risk everything gladly for your sake. You shrink from me. You are tortured by your little *bourgeois* conscience. You are the coward of love.”

She began to weep with hard little sobs and raised a loose sleeve of her

blue silk dressing-gown to her wet eyes.

“My darling,” said Melville in a low voice which was half a whisper. “It’s because I’m burning with love for you that I’m afraid. I ought to have gone away a long time ago but I’m as weak as water when I look at you. Every night I say ‘I must go’ and then I don’t go for the joy of being near you. But one day—perhaps tomorrow—I shall tear myself away. It will be like tearing my heart out.”

“If you go,” said Henriette, in a voice of anguish, “I shall kill myself.”

Suddenly they were both silent, listening intently. There was a noise over their heads. It was the sound of Nigel’s crutches thumping over the bare boards in his work-room upstairs.

Henriette moved towards the door, opened it noiselessly, and fled to her room before Nigel had come downstairs.

CHAPTER XXV

Lord Bramley walked through the village of Church Hampden on a certain St. Patrick's Day which may be notable in history. Its importance had not yet reached the minds of the villagers. Some of them were more interested in the fact that the Old Man, as they called him, rather with affection than disrespect, looked more serious than usual, as though something lay heavily on his mind.

"Feeling his age!" remarked Mrs. Didcott, glancing through her windows as he passed while she was taking a cup of tea with Mrs. Larkin, the butcher's wife.

"His lordship isn't as old as all that," answered Mrs. Larkin. "Not seventy yet, is he? My father is getting on for eighty and still spry, though a bit picksome with his food."

"He's going to see that woman again," was the comment of another sharp-sighted lady who watched all coming and going down the village street. It was Miss Delton, the old sexton's daughter, and it was to her father that she made the remark.

"What woman?" he asked, tapping out his pipe in the fireplace.

"Mrs. Bosanquet, of course. Don't pretend you haven't heard that she's his fancy lady."

"Scandal again!" answered the old man crossly. "You women are always scandalizing your neighbours. I don't 'old with it, being a God-fearing man."

"Facts is facts," said Miss Delton, with a little shrill laugh.

Unconscious of these comments upon him, Lord Bramley walked along the street through the village, stopping as usual for a few words with any small people who happened to be out of doors, and lifting his hat to the Vicar's wife who waggled two fingers at him from the other side of the road.

It was true that he was going to see Mrs. Bosanquet. She opened her cottage door to him herself, having seen him walk up the garden path.

She dropped a curtsey in her doorway like a seventeenth-century milkmaid and said demurely: "Your lordship favours me. Will your lordship deign to enter this humble cot?"

"How are you, Julia, my dear?" he asked, disregarding this nonsense.

“All the better for seeing you,” she answered. “Things have been moving since last you came.”

“In what direction?” he asked. “Towards heaven or the other place?”

“You’re on the side of the angels,” she told him. “I piped my eye when I read your great speech. It was splendid. It gave a noble lead to the nation.”

“Rubbish!” answered Lord Bramley. “Anything good in it was yours.”

He followed her into her sitting-room and let her take his hat and stick.

“No overcoat?” she asked. “On March 17th?”

Lord Bramley smiled at this anxiety.

“It’s mild again and I hate overcoats. How are the children?”

“Out to tea,” she told him. “They’ll be disappointed when they hear you’ve been while they were away.”

“Tell them to come round and have a game of hide-and-seek. I’ve found some new hiding-places which will tease them a bit.”

She laughed at him.

“You spoil them! You put yourself down to their level. I’m not sure it’s right.”

“It’s the only way to treat kids,” he said. “When I think of the way I was bullied as a youngster and stood in dread of my elders I hate the very thought of it. Most children are much more sensible than most grown-ups. Egoists, of course, but honest and without treachery. They respond to people who understand them.”

“I was having tea in the kitchen,” said Mrs. Bosanquet. “The maid has her afternoon out. I’ll bring it in here.”

“No, no!” said Lord Bramley. “What’s wrong with the kitchen?”

There was nothing wrong with the kitchen. It was clean and warm. There was a check cloth on the deal table. Pots and pans sparkled on their hooks. Cups and saucers gleamed in the china cupboard with glass windows.

Mrs. Bosanquet pulled out a kitchen chair for Lord Bramley and laughed in her pleasant way.

“I don’t know what the world would say if they saw the Right Honourable Lord Bramley taking tea in a poor woman’s cottage.”

“I don’t care a damn what they say,” answered his lordship. “This is

charming, and not the first time I've taken tea in a kitchen."

"Honey or jam?" asked Mrs. Bosanquet, after pouring him out a cup of tea.

"Honey?" he asked, raising his eyebrows. "Where do you get that? Not at the village stores I bet."

"A gift from America. My American friends think we're all starving to death. They will send food parcels though I tell them to readdress them to Germany. Their generosity is without bounds."

"I agree."

These words reminded Lord Bramley of something on his mind.

"Before I forget—we must listen to the news at six-thirty. President Truman is going to make a statement before Congress. It may be vastly important."

"I know," said Mrs. Bosanquet. "And what a miracle that we shall hear his very words as he speaks them. When are you going to do some more broadcasting?"

"They don't ask me now," he answered. "I'm on the shelf."

Mrs. Bosanquet put a hot spoon from her tea on the back of his hand making him say, "Damn!"

"A man on the shelf!" she repeated scornfully. "That last speech of yours has travelled round the world. It echoes in people's hearts. They thank heaven for your voice. Don't tell me that you haven't had hundreds of letters about it—including mine."

"Yours was the best," he told her. "I keep it in my wallet. But I must admit I've had a lot of letters. Amazing, really! From all kinds of people, high and low."

"What line do they take?" asked Mrs. Bosanquet.

"They seem to be sick of party quarrels and party politics. They back the idea of something like a coalition, or a truce, until we're out of the wood. But of course one can't tell how many people are thinking like that—probably a very small minority."

"Bigger than you think, perhaps," said Mrs. Bosanquet. "I'm almost sure of that, especially among women and the hard-pressed middle class. If you were to lead a campaign for a centre party, combining all the best brains and all those against the fanatical extremes, I believe you would sweep the country."

Lord Bramley laughed and shook his head.

"You talk like that red-headed squib Christopher Harington. He was saying the same thing not long ago. It's the bee in his bonnet."

"It's the bee in my bonnet," said Mrs. Bosanquet. "I don't know Christopher Harington but we think alike."

"It's a dream," said Lord Bramley, "though I must admit many people seem to be having the same dream just now. I have had letters from many young Conservatives, Liberals and even Labour men."

"That's splendid!" said Mrs. Bosanquet with quiet enthusiasm.

"It's interesting," he admitted. "One of my letters was from Pamela's father-in-law, Stephen Inchbold; I must say he wrote in a very civil way."

"I call that astonishing," said Mrs. Bosanquet.

Lord Bramley agreed.

"Astonishing from a man of his type. A tough fellow with Labour as his religion. So I sized him up when he came to lunch with me one day—the day of Pam's wedding. But he congratulated me on what he called a noble speech and said he stood for national unity as far as possible in a time of peril. I think he referred to the Communist taking-over of Czechoslovakia. Of course he still stood by the Labour policy of democratic Socialism."

Mrs. Bosanquet laughed quietly.

"The ugly head of Communism has scared some of those Labour men," she said. "About time too! I'm glad they're going to chase them out of key positions in the Civil Service."

Lord Bramley seemed doubtful about that.

"I don't quite like it. I'm not in favour of witch hunts. Of course we must safeguard state secrets. That's the devil of it. Do you remember the spy ring in Canada? It was like one of those sensational films."

He broke off suddenly and laughed.

"Don't let's talk stuff like this. How lovely your daffodils are!" He went to the kitchen window and looked out to the little garden with its prim paths.

"Only just beginning," said Mrs. Bosanquet.

"This is a charming little place," said Lord Bramley. "I wouldn't mind ending my days in a cottage like this. Probably I shall have to. If there's anything like a Capital Levy or if we go all out on Inflation..."

He had come back to politics but swerved away from them.

"I'll help you wash up."

"Not you!" said Mrs. Bosanquet firmly. "I should burst into tears if I saw one of our noble lords working at the sink, especially as you'd break things."

"Not I. Do you think I've never washed up a cup and saucer?"

"Well, have a go," said Mrs. Bosanquet, looking very much amused. "I'll do the washing and you can do the wiping. It won't take two shakes of a jiffy."

She sang at the sink as she poured hot water into a zinc basin. Once she looked round at him with a smile and said, "If only the *Daily Mirror* could take a picture of this!"

"Your side of it would be a pretty picture, Julia," he told her. "You get prettier every day."

"Untrue!" she cried. "I found my first grey hair yesterday and plucked it out in terror. Soon I'll be old and ugly."

"Never that if you live for a hundred years," said Lord Bramley. "But I admit that the years pass like the whiff of a cigarette. Life is astonishingly quick. To me forty years seems like a week-end. Where do I put these cups?"

She took them from him and hung them up on little hooks on the dresser.

"Thanks for your toil," she said, "and no breakages."

"I want some music as a reward," he told her. "Play to me, my dear. Some of those Debussy things."

"Why don't you get Henriette to play for you?" asked Mrs. Bosanquet.

Lord Bramley raised both hands slightly.

"She's a lazy little slut and as selfish as a Persian kitten. She seems to have lost her taste for the piano. Besides she doesn't play well. Brilliant but hard. No touch of sympathy or any hint of the supernatural. That's where you come in, my dear."

"I'll do my best for you," said Mrs. Bosanquet simply.

She did her best for him and he was satisfied. For nearly an hour he sat quite still listening to her with his eyes shut. Once glancing at him she thought he was asleep and then was certain of it when she saw his head droop on to his chest. She stopped playing and came to sit at his feet while he slept as peacefully as a child. Just before half past six she remembered something and looked at her wrist-watch. The President of the United States was going to say

something to the world. It might be worth hearing or very likely might not. Lord Bramley wanted to hear it.

She touched his hand and said quietly, “Wake up, my dear.”

He opened his eyes and looked surprised.

“Good heavens! I must have dropped off for a moment. How disgraceful! An old man’s weakness. The advance of senility. I’m going gaga. How much of Debussy did I miss?”

She reassured him.

“Nothing at all. Now we must listen to the voice of America. President Truman speaks.”

“Must we?” he asked doubtfully. “Need we let a raucous voice into this little sanctuary? It will spoil this peace and the scent of those daffodils on the table.”

“Duty calls, my lord,” answered Mrs. Bosanquet. “What the President says may alter the shape of things to come.”

“For better or worse?” asked Lord Bramley with his quizzical smile.

Mrs. Bosanquet manipulated the knobs of a little wireless instrument shaped like the globe in thin alabaster which was illumined when she switched on its power.

The President spoke in a firm voice not too harsh in its American accent. Lord Bramley, who had looked bored at the idea of it, leaned forward listening intently as the little man named Truman indicted one nation for holding back the peace of the world, one nation for frustrating the United Nations by using the veto twenty-five times in two years, one nation for an utter refusal of co-operation in the task of promoting peace and prosperity, one nation for adopting an aggressive policy to advance its military and strategic plans. What had happened in Czechoslovakia was a threat to the free peoples of Europe and the world. The advance of Communism would have to be met in order to safeguard the liberties of the democratic nations.

“Therefore...” said the President.

He proposed to enforce conscription on the American people in order that they might fulfil their commitments and their responsibilities in a world full of danger.

“With God’s help we shall succeed.”

Mrs. Bosanquet switched off the wireless at the end of this sentence when

the applause of Congress had faded out.

"What do you think of it?" she asked, gravely.

"Remarkable!" said Lord Bramley. "The American people are not shirking their destiny. They're out to save the last sanctuaries of civilization. Perhaps it's the only way they may be saved."

"It frightens me," said Mrs. Bosanquet in a low voice.

Lord Bramley raised his eyebrows in surprise and then on second thoughts said: "Yes! It's all very alarming."

Mrs. Bosanquet spoke in an anxious way.

"It lets the whole world know that the shadow of war is over us again. The Americans think it's going to happen. That call for conscription——"

Lord Bramley gave a groan.

"There's no camouflage now. Communism is the enemy. Russia is the enemy. That reiteration of 'one nation' was the naked truth, I fear."

Mrs. Bosanquet stared into his eyes.

"I'm the mother of two children. I don't want to see them killed."

"Russia won't risk a war yet," said Lord Bramley.

Mrs. Bosanquet was not comforted.

" 'Yet' isn't good enough," she said. "Two years, three years, what difference does that make? Even fifteen years, when my Christopher will be old enough to be called up. Dilly dilly come and be killed!"

She spoke the last words in a shrill way and her fingers were crisped nervously.

"I agree," said Lord Bramley. "Such a prospect is too damnable after two World Wars, after all our agonies and blood. It's selfish for me to say I hope I'll be dead before it happens, if it happens."

Mrs. Bosanquet gave a little cry of anguish.

"It mustn't happen! Can't you stop it happening?"

Lord Bramley raised his hands again and let them drop.

"I have no power. Nor has any one nation the power to thrust those devils back to their own hell. The Western Nations must get together in self defence. It's a rearguard action for the traditions of Christian civilization. Something is

being done about it, thank God. Bevin is signing a pact with Belgium, France and Holland. Sixteen nations are getting together over the Marshall Plan. Those are first steps. Now the American President guarantees the liberties of democratic peoples with the full weight of military power."

"Will it be quick enough?" asked Mrs. Bosanquet.

Lord Bramley hesitated. He did not want to speak false things to this woman who was frightened, this brave woman as he knew her to be.

"Not strong enough yet. The enemy is within the gates. The Communists are like rats gnawing at the foundations of civilized society. I see this world struggle as a war to the death between the forces of good and evil. It goes deeper than national enmities or lust for power. The Communists don't acknowledge any difference between truth and falsehood. They refuse to accept any law of right and wrong. They uphold the doctrine of the end justifying the means, by lies, murder, massacre, tortures and all cruelties. Isn't it really a religious war between morality as Christ taught it and the damned old Baal with human sacrifice and all iniquity?"

He pulled himself up and laughed.

"Good heavens! I'm making a speech. And I'm talking like a Sunday School teacher, though I'm a most imperfect Christian with precious little faith and a horror of sermons!"

"Go on talking," said Mrs. Bosanquet. "Talk like that in the House of Lords. Tell the people over the wireless. We want a spiritual leadership. I've told you so before and you have the vision and the voice, my dear."

Lord Bramley shook his head though there was a laugh in his eyes.

"I'm just a gaga old man."

CHAPTER XXVI

OTHER people in other homes were talking like this on St. Patrick's Day now forgotten and overtaken by the swift tide of history. The American President's words, relayed over all the broadcast stations of the world so that one heard the murmur and cheers of his immediate audience, were startling and frightening in their stark reminder of a grim menace of another war—an atomic war. That fear had lurked in many minds but they had kept it in the shadow world of their subconsciousness. Now the danger creeping closer was under the fierce searchlight of publicity and it was no longer possible to ignore it as the ravings of hysteria or as an improbability of horror. Parents of young children looked at each other and said: "Where can we go? What about South Africa?... New Zealand?... Australia?... No good staying here to be blasted off the earth."

It had happened here, in 1939, this sense of being caught in a trap, this urge to escape somehow, anywhere with precious young lives. The reassurance of American aid in the defence of the democracies did not outweigh the fear that events were moving towards another struggle of the human tribes, another time of agony and sacrifice the last perhaps before final extinction.

So people talked in thousands of homes, until a few days passed and in self defence the fear was thrust back from the mind and people went about their daily work, not panic-stricken by the ticking of the clock.

Pamela was getting worried about Julian. There was something wrong about him, something wrong about his outlook on life, his way of life, his sense of right and wrong or complete lack of it. He was not open or honest with her, but secretive and sometimes furtive. What did he do all day among his rather low-class friends? When she questioned him he put her off with a laugh or vague statements.

"Arranging a business deal. Quite a chance if properly handled.... Langley has a lot of irons in the fire. He's forming a little syndicate and letting me in on the ground floor."

"I don't like that man Langley," she told him. "He has a false smile. He's a cad pretending to be a gentleman."

Julian laughed at that.

"You're prejudiced! And anyhow aren't we all cads nowadays? That term

‘gentleman’ is very old-fashioned. Is there such a person? How does one recognize him? Does he wear a monocle and spats?”

She ignored this flippancy and tried to cross-question him about those business affairs.

“What kind of syndicate is Langley forming? A syndicate for what?”

“Oh, just buying and selling.”

“Buying and selling what, Julian? I’d like to know.”

“Any old thing. Things which the public can’t get because of the shortages.”

“How does Langley get them?”

“By keeping his eyes open and having friends. They play into each other’s hands, of course. Dear old Charlie passes something on to dear old Fred. The boys, God bless ’em!”

“Julian,” said Pamela, seriously, “I wish you had a regular kind of job in the Civil Service or something decent. Your father could get you one, couldn’t he? Something administrative, something open and above board.”

Julian laughed loudly.

“Patronage?” he asked. “Wangling a good billet because I’m the son of a Labour member? I’m shocked at you, Pam. Most immoral. But being done all the time by this Labour Government. A legion of parasites. Well, I’m not blaming them. It’s the system now. But I wouldn’t ask my father for any favour and I wouldn’t enter the Civil Service at any price. I don’t want to be a wage-slave or a ‘Yes’ man. I’m not a licker-on of stamps. There’s no money in it anyhow.”

Pamela sighed and then laughed.

“Is it any use earning money nowadays? Don’t the Commissioners of Inland Revenue see to that? The more one earns the more they take. Isn’t that so?”

Julian grinned and shrugged his shoulders.

“That’s so among mugs. But there’s always a way of dodging that kind of thing. Cash payments or what is called ‘hot money’.”

A little frown puckered Pamela’s forehead.

“Isn’t that what they call the Black Market?”

Julian answered cheerfully.

"It certainly is."

"Isn't it terribly dishonest?"

Julian shrugged his shoulders again.

"Nothing's dishonest if one can get away with it—within the law. And the law nowadays, with all its ridiculous rules, is so damn' silly that it's a pleasure to walk through its loopholes."

Pamela cried out half laughingly and half distressfully:

"Julian, you have no sense of morality! You frighten me sometimes."

Julian raised his eyebrows and smiled.

"As old Joad would say, it depends upon what you mean by morality. Doesn't morality change according to climate, religion, and national habit or prejudice? The morality of the early-Victorians was quite different from ours, thank God. They thought it immoral to go to the playhouse or to play cards on a Sunday."

Pamela was ready to argue with him on this subject.

"One knows what's right and what's wrong."

"Does one?" asked Julian with a sceptical smile. "Hitler thought it right to kill Jews. Stalin thinks it right to employ slave labour in the mines. The Tories think it right to dismiss Communists from Civil Service posts. The Communists think it right to conspire against the *bourgeois* system."

Pamela shook her head and raised an accusing finger.

"In one's soul one knows what is good and what is evil."

Julian laughed at this statement.

"I haven't got a soul. I was born without one. I don't believe there is such a thing."

Pamela looked into his eyes and in hers there was a look of fear. She did not say anything, but in her mind was the question which scared her.

'Is he just an animal? My Greek faun, as I used to call him—have I married a man without a soul?'

He saw the frightened look in her eyes and was amused.

"I haven't got a cloven hoof," he told her, as though guessing her thought.

Pamela could not understand her husband’s financial affairs. He seemed to have plenty of money now and then and one day she saw his pocket-book was stuffed with one-pound notes.

“Profit on the syndicate,” he told her. “Easy money!”

Easy come, easy go. He gave expensive little dinner parties—one even at the Ritz—with always Langley as one of his guests and that vulgar crowd which she detested. At other times he told her he was hard up. The syndicate had taken a knock.

One evening he said something to her which made her very angry with a sense of shock. They were alone together in their little flat. Julian had come in late while she was listening to the wireless waiting for him.

He kissed her hair as she sat on a cushion near the electric fire. Then he lit a cigarette and read the financial page in the evening paper while she went on listening to a play, marvellously well done by the B.B.C.’s company of players.

“Turn that off,” said Julian suddenly and irritably. “I want to speak to you.”

She switched off and said, “Sorry, darling!”

“Look here,” he said, “I’m stony broke at the moment. Do you think you could touch your father for a bit?”

She looked at him with astonishment and alarm.

“Julian, what do you mean? Wasn’t Father terribly generous with his wedding gift? We still have most of that, haven’t we?”

“Good lord, no!” answered Julian. “All that went long ago.”

“Julian!” cried Pamela, springing up from the cushion on the floor. “That can’t be true. We simply can’t have spent all that money. Three thousand pounds! It was our nest egg.”

Julian flung a half-smoked cigarette into the fireplace and answered impatiently.

“What’s £3,000? It goes nowhere in this time of shortages and high prices. Anyhow it’s gone with the wind and I’m devilish hard up.”

“But, Julian,” said Pamela rather breathlessly, “you had no right to use it without my consent. Father gave it to me. It was my money.”

Julian gave a little uneasy laugh.

“Didn’t we agree to put everything into the pool? Didn’t you let me bank it in my own name? Wasn’t that the arrangement?”

“Yes,” Pamela answered quietly, “I did that when I believed in your loyalty and in your honesty.”

Her voice rose and had a note of anguish in it.

“Julian, you haven’t been loyal. You haven’t been honest. I’m beginning to think you’re false all through. It’s a dreadful thought. It terrifies me.”

Julian answered carelessly though he looked annoyed.

“Now then, Pam, for heaven’s sake don’t make a scene. I only used the money for a deal which didn’t come off. That was just bad luck after a run of good luck. It always happens like that. One must expect ups and downs. At the moment I’m in downs. I suggest you write a note to your dad and ask him to come to the rescue. A bit more off his capital won’t hurt the old man.”

“No!” cried Pamela. “I would rather cut off my right hand. Father has been too good already. I won’t write begging letters, even if we have to starve.”

Julian laughed again uneasily.

“Proud and haughty woman!” he said lightly. “What’s the good of having a rich father if he doesn’t cough up a bit in answer to an S O S from a beautiful and penniless daughter?”

Pamela answered him coldly.

“Father isn’t rich. His class is being wiped out, as well you know, Julian. In any case I should feel disgraced if I wrote to him with the news that his wedding gift had all gone. He wouldn’t believe it. I can’t believe it myself. Julian, are you telling me the truth?”

“The bald and naked truth,” answered Julian, carelessly. “In fact I have an overdraft at the Bank. At the moment we’re in Queer Street, Pam. Lots of unpaid bills, alas! We may have to tighten our belts unless the local tradesmen let us live on tick for a while. Your father’s name is good enough for that.”

Pamela turned white. She stared at Julian with angry eyes.

“Leave my father’s name out of this, Julian. If you use my father’s name I’ll leave you. I’ll never come back to you.”

Julian rose and tried to put his arms round her but she thrust him away. It was the first time that she had repelled him like this, not yielding to the spell of her Dionysus with his laughing grace.

There were no more parties for a time except when Julian's friends invited them. Julian became moody and irritable at times though at others he regained his light-heartedness and told Pamela that he expected to do a pretty good deal before long which would set them on their feet again. Meanwhile he was selling some of his things to obtain ready money. Pamela discovered that by accident. She noticed one morning that he was not wearing a gold wrist-watch that he had bought in Germany. She noticed it when as a matter of habit he jerked his arm out to look at it and it was not there.

"Where's your watch?" she asked. "You haven't lost it, I hope."

He coloured up slightly and then laughed.

"I must say I miss it. I sold it three days ago. I wonder you haven't noticed its absence before. I feel naked without it."

"Oh, Julian, what a pity!"

Julian took the matter lightly.

"I ought to have got a hundred for it, but I could only get seventy-five quid. Let's make up a little party tonight on the strength of it."

"No!" cried Pamela. "Have you forgotten the tradesmen's bills?"

"Oh, damn the tradesmen! They can wait."

A week or two later Pamela noticed something else was missing. She noticed it when he took a cigarette from a paper packet instead of the silver cigarette-case that she had given him in Germany when they were first engaged. It was beautifully chased, and she had had some words engraved in it.

To Julian from the loving heart of Pamela.

"It's the first time I've seen you smoking cigarettes from a paper packet," she remarked. Then suddenly the idea that he had sold it came into her mind.

"Julian, has it gone too? Did you sell it?"

"I was sorry to part with it," he answered, looking up at her from a low chair by the tea-table. "It gave me quite a pang."

It gave Pamela a pang. She had scraped and stinted on her salary in Germany to buy this present. But that didn't matter. It was her gift of love to him with those words engraved inside.

"It was a mascot," she told him. "It was a pledge of love."

He saw her distress and answered it.

“Yes, I’m sorry about it, especially as it didn’t fetch more than forty quid. These dealers do one down.”

He turned the subject quickly.

“By the way, we’re playing bridge tonight at the Shuttleworths’. Don’t forget what I told you about the ‘one club’ call.”

“I hate playing with those people,” answered Pamela. “And the stakes are too high. They frighten me.”

“Well, we walked off last time with quite a packet,” Julian answered cheerfully. “If you learn my conventions and way of play we can earn quite a little income out of bridge. I must say I have luck with the cards. In the end I always win.”

During this period when Julian was not earning money Pamela saw something of Kit Harington. He called on her several times at odd hours in the afternoon when he could get away from the House of Commons.

After two or three visits he said: “I’m making a habit of this. Do you mind?”

“I like it,” she told him. “It’s very sweet of you, Kit.”

The red-headed Harington laughed at this tribute to his sweetness.

“It’s a temptation I can’t resist. But you must admit that I’m behaving very nicely for a cave man. No scenes of violence. No attempt to carry you off under one arm.”

“Don’t let’s talk nonsense,” answered Pamela. “Let’s keep our conversation civilized. Or, if we must talk nonsense, let’s keep it away from ourselves.”

On one of his visits he looked at her searchingly and then made an accusation.

“I don’t believe you’re happy.”

A faint flush of colour crept into her face, and she answered with a laugh.

“What makes you think that?”

“You look worn and worried.”

“Getting ugly?” she asked.

“I said worn and worried. You’re hiding a sadness in your eyes, even when you’re smiling. What’s gone wrong, Pam?”

“I asked you not to talk nonsense,” she reminded him. “Not personal nonsense, I mean. You can talk as much nonsense as you like about politics, the international situation, or debates in the House of Commons. Personalities barred, please! I mean yours and mine. Tell me something to make me laugh, Kit.”

He made her laugh about the Governor of a Crown Colony sent out by the Labour Government. They chose a former Trade Union leader from one of the outer suburbs of London where he lived in a small house, in a street of small houses, with his wife who did the shopping and the cooking and the washing up. There was a palace waiting for them and they felt lost in it. The dining-room was like the ballroom of Versailles on a somewhat smaller scale but very long—so long that His Excellency at one end of the table was beyond reach of confidential conversation with his homely little wife at the other end. Fortunately a butler had been bequeathed to them by the last Governor, and he took the matter in hand, putting them into a small dining-room and making them more comfortable. He became the Governor’s chief adviser but could not persuade him to use his expenses allowance for entertainment of any old aristocracy who still lived in the colony. Nor could he restrain the wife of his Excellency from doing her shopping in the native quarter, filled as she was with nostalgia for the queues in dear old London.

“Who told you that?” asked Pamela, laughing as he hoped she would.

“The butler,” answered Kit Harington. “He’s home on leave and wanted to hear a debate in the House of Commons. I had a long chat with him and he made me laugh outrageously. He used to be butler to my Aunt Helen in Eaton Place.”

“It would make a funny play,” said Pamela.

“Yes, the butler would have to run the colony like ‘Itma’,” said Harington. He let his imagination run free on this comedy and built up some amusing and fantastic situations. But he was watching Pamela all the time. He made her laugh but he was certain that in the depths of her eyes there was that sadness upon which he had remarked.

‘Things aren’t going well with this marriage,’ he thought. ‘Pam, poor darling, is unhappy with that fellow Julian. I wish to heaven she hadn’t married him.’

“What’s happening in the House tonight?” asked Pamela.

He gave a kind of groan and answered gloomily.

“A debate on Civil Defence—air-raid shelters before the ruins of the last

war have been cleared away."

"How frightful!"

"Damnable!" said Harington. "Crazy! The world has gone mad, and deserves to be smudged out. If another war happens it will be, and serve it damn' well right!"

Pamela put in a word for the innocent and the peace-loving and the guiltless babes. Why should they be smudged out because of the wickedness of a few evil minds?

So they talked, and he kissed her hand when he went.

He sat in the House that afternoon and listened in a cold fury to a debate on the best means of defence against atom bombs and bacteriological warfare, with a Government statement on future plans for deep shelters and dispersal areas. There was an awful acceptance of the probability of another war, and the word 'preparedness' was reiterated abominably. It was late in the debate before Christopher Harington caught the Speaker's eye. Something had been boiling up inside him, a kind of angry despair, a fury with the insanity of the human mind, a passionate refusal to accept the inevitability of unimaginable horrors. For once he found himself agreeing with a Communist member who spoke fiercely against this mad acquiescence in the approach of doom and he was moved profoundly by a woman member who made a speech filled with deep emotion and expressing her horror at the subject of debate.

Harington spoke with a kind of rage. The Chamber was emptying, but members turned to look at that red-headed back-bencher whose voice rang out harshly and whose words were on fire with passion.

"The speeches from the Government front bench," he said, "will send a chill down the spine of millions of people in little homes listening to a summary of them tonight. 'Are these the fruits of peace,' they will ask, 'promised to us by a Labour Government?'—new air-raid shelters, a brown-paper defence against atom bombs, death by radio-active energy in the crowded cities of this land, or a panic-stricken flight to caves in the Welsh mountains, or into tubes and subways of the underground world while above them their houses and habitations are blasted off the face of the earth. What a beautiful picture of human progress! What a tribute to the intelligence and wisdom of the human race! It is impossible to our people to believe that the Government of this country, the leaders of all parties, are drifting helplessly towards that flaming gulf of horror, that furnace of hell into which all of us will be cast if such a war should happen. There has been a lot of talk tonight about 'preparedness', a ghastly word. Preparedness for what? There is not a

single speaker in this House on the Government front bench who does not know in his soul that preparedness for an atomic war is preparedness for one great graveyard which once was England. There is no defence against atomic warfare. If once that power is known to our enemies, as doubtless it is known, there is only an exchange of destructive force, destroying one city for another city, making a Hiroshima of all the centres of population and industry on one side and on the other. Let us, for God's sake, give up talking nonsense about air-raid shelters and brown paper. That is just the foulest insincerity, the meanest and most miserable propaganda to allay the fears of simple souls, though there is none so simple as will believe it. We must roll back the shadow of this fear, not by preparing hiding-places which will be useless under the ruins, but by a spiritual crusade strong enough to convert the people of every nation to a sense of human brotherhood for their own survival's sake. That may be impossible, a vain ideal. Behind the Iron Curtain of the Slav rule there are men—the Leaders—who are ruthless in their fanaticism, and without pity, and without any spiritual faith or ideals. They keep their people behind a wall of ignorance and illusion. Somehow we must break a way through—not by atom bombs, but by the reaching out of the spirit and the heart. Somehow we must dispel their darkness by the light of knowledge. Impossible, you may say. Perhaps that is so. Then all is impossible except the final doom which God himself, or Fate, may have pronounced upon mankind for its iniquities."

Something like that he said, with white-hot passion, before he sat down abruptly.

A fellow member next to him touched his arm.

"Fine stuff, old man. Too idealistic, though. Come and have a drink."

In the smoking-room one of the Labour members followed him out and commented on his speech. It was Stephen Inchbold, who spoke in a kindly way.

"Thanks for what you said. I agree with your anger and disgust. I feel like that myself. But what can we do about Russia? We've tried to be friendly. We've kept all doors open. They spit on our hands when we offer them in friendship. One must face realities."

He gripped Harington's hand in a friendly way, and then went over to a group of friends.

CHAPTER XXVII

Stephen Inchbold saw something of his daughter-in-law and liked her much, though always he felt a little embarrassed in her presence. His class consciousness could not forget that she was the daughter of a peer belonging to a caste which from boyhood days he had regarded as the enemies of the people. But he was bound to admit that this girl Pamela was very disarming and altogether charming, without a touch of arrogance. Marjorie had fallen in love with her, and Mrs. Inchbold thought her a dear, and was delighted when she came round with Julian, or, more often, without him. Stephen Inchbold himself watched her with his shrewd eyes, and became uneasy.

Several times there was, he thought, an anxious, hunted look in her eyes, as though she were trapped in some psychological cage and could find no way of escape.

‘Poor lass!’ thought Inchbold. ‘I’m sorry for her. It was a mistake of hers to marry Julian.’

He was anxious himself about Julian who bore his name. What was the fellow up to? Why didn’t he do some decent job of work? How was he earning, or attempting to earn, his living?

One Saturday evening when Julian came round alone it happened that Mrs. Inchbold and Marjorie were out at ‘the pictures’, so that father and son were alone.

After some desultory talk about the economic position, for which Julian blamed the Labour Government as usual, Inchbold asked him a direct question.

“What are you doing these days, lad? How are you making a livelihood, or how do you propose to do so?”

Julian shrugged his shoulders and smiled.

“A difficult question to answer, Dad! Your crowd makes it very difficult by crushing individual initiative and private enterprise.”

“That’s no answer,” said Inchbold; “I’m asking you a plain question. I’d like to have a plain answer. What are you doing for a week’s pay packet?”

“Nothing much at the moment,” admitted Julian. “A streak of bad luck after making a bit here and there.”

“In what way?” asked his father bluntly.

“Buying and selling.”

“Buying what? Selling what?”

“Any old thing,” answered Julian, carelessly. “Rayons, textiles, off the coupon, second-hand furniture, watches, silver cigarette-cases, junk.”

“It sounds to me a bit like the Black Market,” said Stephen Inchbold.

Julian laughed light-heartedly.

“That’s what you *would* think! Anything outside bulk buying by the Government goes by the name of the Black Market.”

“Some of it is,” answered Inchbold, “and too much of it. There’s a crowd of spivs—isn’t that the new name?—trying to outwit the law and doing it, I’m told, with considerable ease and profit.”

“Why not?” asked Julian blandly.

Inchbold looked at his son angrily.

“Because it’s wrong,” he answered. “Because it’s dishonest. Because it’s unpatriotic and disloyal.”

Julian stretched out his legs and blew a circle of cigarette-smoke from his pursed lips.

“Words!” he said. “Quite meaningless. A Government makes a lot of rules and regulations without the consent of the people and then regards them as Holy Writ. The girl who wants a pair of stockings can’t have them if she’s used up her coupons for a new frock and a pair of knickers. She didn’t help to make the law. She doesn’t like it. She thinks it’s all idiotic—as it is. Is she to be called disloyal and dishonest if she buys a pair of stockings on the side, coupon free?”

“Yes,” said Inchbold. “It means that someone is forging coupons or getting hold of them by fraud. She’s conniving at a crime.”

Julian sighed loudly as though this kind of talk made him tired.

“There are so many new crimes nowadays,” he said. “One can’t keep track of them. Everybody is breaking the law in one way or another.”

“Julian, my lad,” said Stephen Inchbold harshly, “you’re essentially dishonest. You always have been. And yet God knows you’ve an honest father and mother, and come from a good stock.”

Julian coloured up faintly and looked for a moment as though he would lose his temper, but he controlled himself and laughed instead.

"We look at things in a different way. I'm no more dishonest than anyone who attempts to make a bit of profit out of trading, or tries to dodge the income tax by loopholes in the law. But I'm not going to have a quarrel with you, Dad. As a matter of fact I came round to ask a favour. For the moment I'm strapped. If you could spare fifty quid or so——"

Stephen Inchbold breathed hard for a moment as though caught in the wind.

"Fifty pounds!" he exclaimed.

"Well, to be honest," said Julian, "it would be better if you made it a hundred and fifty. I'm getting into trouble with the local tradesmen. I don't want Pamela to starve to death. She refuses to ask my noble father-in-law."

"Julian," said Stephen Inchbold, "I don't like all this. It alarms me. I wasn't brought up in that school. Your mother and I were never in debt by a penny. We stinted and scraped in the early days. If we couldn't afford a thing we didn't have it, not even a leg of mutton for the Sunday joint."

Julian answered carelessly.

"Times have changed. The working man gets his quid a week and still smokes his cigarettes at tuppence-ha'penny each."

"Principles don't change," said his father sternly.

Then he went to his desk—that cheap roll-top desk—and pulled out his cheque-book. Julian watched him with a curious smile as he wrote some words and figures in it slowly. What words and what figures? he wondered. They were for £150.

"Thanks," said Julian. "Very good of you."

"It'll skin me," said his father, coldly. "I've heavy expenses. I'm doing this for your wife's sake. I don't want her to be let down by an Inchbold. My family has its pride as well as hers."

Julian laughed as though he thought this very amusing.

"The Montagues versus the Capulets! The same old story of rival houses and family pride."

Shortly afterwards he raised a hand and said, "So long, Dad," and departed.

He said nothing immediately to Pamela about that £150, nor did much of it

find its way into the hands of local tradesmen. He seemed to have other debts which were more urgent, perhaps among his friends, and he gave a supper party in Soho with *apéritifs* and liqueurs which must have cost £10 or more, to the annoyance and alarm of Pamela.

"Julian," she said, when they were back in their flat at midnight, "I sometimes think you're mad!"

"We're all mad," he replied good-naturedly, having enjoyed himself, and being what he called 'mellow'. "The whole world is crazy, Pam. But why do you think I'm especially mad?"

"You spent money tonight like water, and yet we're terribly in debt. I hardly dare go and order things because of the cold looks I get. Where did you get that money to pay for the supper tonight? Notes fell from your wallet like autumn leaves."

"Oh, just a small packet," he told her. "As a matter of fact I touched my father for it. He parted with it reluctantly, though it was due to me for losses sustained owing to Labour legislation in which he had some hand."

"Julian!" cried Pamela. "You have no conscience. Your father is a comparatively poor man, but you spent his money tonight like an eighteenth-century rake."

"Purely for business purposes," he assured her. "A sprat to catch a whale. That fellow Dormant is very influential. He's one of the Big Noises. What does the Scripture say? Make friends of the mammon of uprighteousness. I seem to remember that."

"Your friends are loathsome," said Pamela.

He smiled at her over his shoulder as he poured out a small tot of whisky as a night-cap.

"I agree! Those types of humanity are very unattractive, but one has to play up to them. I want you to help me. I need your help in that way, old girl. It's darned important for both of us—for bread-and-butter with a bit of jam on it. See what I mean, Pam?"

She saw what he meant and tried to play up. There were bridge parties in their flat and in other people's flats. She learnt Julian's conventions and his form of play so that nearly always they won. Several times she remonstrated with him about this.

"It almost amounts to cheating, Julian. I tell you exactly what's in my hand. You tell me."

“But, my dear kid,” he answered, “that’s the whole art of bridge. That’s exactly how one ought to play according to the book which I urge you to study.”

“I might as well show you my hand,” she argued. “You might as well show me yours.”

“It amounts to the same thing,” he told her airily. “Conventions are not a secret language. They’re open to everybody.”

“It’s unfair to those who don’t know,” answered Pamela, “and a husband and wife always playing together are in a kind of conspiracy. It’s like card sharping.”

He dismissed that view with smiling contempt.

“That’s the game. That’s bridge. It just happens that we play rather well. Of course one needs a bit of luck with the cards.”

He had astoundingly good luck.

She kept all this secret from her father. When he kissed her and said, “How’s it going with you, Pam?” she answered: “Fine, Father! The usual little worries of course. Marriage is not entirely a bed of roses.”

“Sometimes it’s a bed of thorns,” he answered, smiling at her with a tenderness in his eyes. “But you’re looking very beautiful, my dear, so you can’t be unhappy. That’s grand. Full marks to your Julian. By the way, when are you going to bring him down to Church Hampden?”

“He’s afraid of Mother,” she answered laughingly. “And so am I!”

“Fudge!” answered her father. “Your mother is a masterful woman with many prejudices—many passionate prejudices, especially in politics—but she happens to be a lady of the old-fashioned kind. Ladies of the old-fashioned kind may be blunt, but they were brought up in a good school of manners.... I’m not quite sure of that, by the way, now I come to think of it. I’ve known some terrible old dragons in my time, experts in rudeness and arrogance. Still, that’s beside the mark. Bring down your Julian.”

“One day,” she answered vaguely.

CHAPTER XXVIII

PAMELA was with her father when he fulfilled his promise to take Marjorie to the ballet. Julian was going to be out at a men's dinner. They fetched Marjorie in the car. Pamela had put on a simple evening frock—black with a little lace round the neck—but Lord Bramley wore a tail coat and white waistcoat instead of his usual dinner jacket.

"I thought I would give the child a treat," he said, with his whimsical smile. "Besides I'm always respectful to the ballet."

Marjorie was waiting for them in the entrance hall of the block of flats facing Battersea Park. She looked like a Columbine in a white frock with a puffed skirt and had a circlet of tiny artificial roses round her hair. Unfortunately she had overdone her lipstick and her mouth was a smear of scarlet. She had shining eyes when she greeted Pamela.

"I feel like Cinderella on her way to the ball," she said. "I'm so excited that I want to be sick."

"Well, don't be sick in Father's car!" cried Pamela. "He's put on his best evening clothes in your honour."

"Oh, I'll keep it down," she promised.

"Excuse me for not getting out," said Lord Bramley when she flopped into the car after hitting her head on the door. "The privilege of old age, or perhaps the excuse of laziness. You're looking charming, my dear young lady!"

"Think so?" asked Marjorie. "Anyhow it's nice of you to say so. I borrowed this frock from a girl in the School of Economics. It's a bit on the tight side, especially round the waistline. Don't be surprised if buttons begin to fly off at critical moments."

She chattered excitedly, and Pamela admired her complete frankness of speech and was quietly amused by it and by her father's old-world courtesy to this very modern young creature who blurted out everything that came into her mind without shy self-consciousness.

They had three seats in the stalls and Marjorie was impressed by the general recognition of Lord Bramley.

She heard whispers as he passed.

“That’s Lord Bramley!... Looks a bit older since the war. Do you remember his broadcasts?”

“I fell in love with him!”

“If only he were in power now!”

So spoke two people in the seats behind Marjorie, unconscious that their whispered comments were audible. Marjorie nudged her elderly companion and whispered to him.

“Two people behind think an awful lot of you.”

“Is that so? How strange!”

“One of them fell in love with you during the War.”

“Is she beautiful?”

“No, an ugly old hag.”

“How disappointing!”

Marjorie gave a squeal of laughter quickly suppressed when the conductor of the orchestra appeared and took his bow.

She was entranced by the performance and sat spellbound with her eyes like stars. But it was not her first evening at the ballet by any means and she astonished Pamela’s father by her knowledge of choreography.

“How do you know all this?” he asked. “I thought I was taking you to the ballet for the first time.”

“Gosh, no! I’ve been at least a dozen times before. But of course I go into the cheap seats with my student friends. As a matter of fact there’s a group of them up there now. Do you mind if I signal to them?”

“No,” said Lord Bramley. “Why not? I always have a soft spot in my heart for the gods.”

Marjorie stood up facing the gallery and made a few mysterious signals with her right-hand thumb and forefinger. She did not tell her elderly and distinguished friend that the group in the gallery—at least eight—had come specially to see her grandeur in the stalls with such a noble and unbelievable escort. From the gallery came a gust of laughter and various friendly or derisive noises, somewhat shocking to conventional people in the stalls.

Marjorie gave another squeal of laughter and then sat down.

“Sorry!” she said. “Those boys up there are my particular friends. They’re

quite worthy really."

"What do they think about the world situation?" asked Lord Bramley. "Does it worry them at all?"

"Quite a bit," answered Marjorie. "It casts a shadow over their young minds. That's why they seek my companionship. I seem to have a bracing effect upon them. Or perhaps I act as an anodyne."

Lord Bramley was much amused by Stephen Inchbold's daughter who prattled to him during the intervals while sharing a box of chocolates with Pamela. She was curiously childish and curiously sophisticated. She had the frankness and the simplicity of a child and a knowledge of life which would have been shocking to an elder generation. Her own views on the political situation at home were unusual and interesting.

"I'm all for Labour, of course," she told him. "But they're making a big mistake in starving the home market, and putting on the screw too hard. They ask the working people to save, but what's the use of saving if there's no chance of spending? People don't save for the fun of the thing! One day they want to buy things—when a girl has a baby or when the children want new clothes. What's the good of working one's guts out if there's no reward for hard work but the same old austerities with rising prices? That's where Pa and I differ. Pa thinks the Labour Government can do no wrong. Of course you think it can do no right. That's where you and I differ."

"Not so very much," said Lord Bramley. "I agree with a good deal of what you say."

Pamela was the silent one, sitting on her father's right hand, glad to hear him talking with Marjorie Inchbold. She was thinking about her married life. It was going all wrong. She had no sense of security with Julian. He had no sense of truthfulness which in her mind should be the basis of married relations. He was untruthful about little things when there was no need of it, even from his point of view. If he said he was going to the post it was quite likely that he was going somewhere else to get a drink at the 'Six Bells', or to back a horse with a bookmaker. Once when he told her he was going to get his hair cut she saw him pass the hairdresser's and walk quickly down a side street leading to Raphael Street, where, as she remembered, that blonde, blowzy woman, Mrs. Weeks, had a tiny house with green window-boxes. She happened to see him do this because she had run after him remembering suddenly that she had no money and wanted to buy some fish for supper that evening. She didn't follow him down Raphael Street but questioned him when he came home two hours later.

“Why didn’t you have your hair cut, Julian?”

He put his hand over his hair and lied to her.

“Oh, I had a trim. Doesn’t it look like it?”

“Julian, you didn’t have your hair cut. Why did you go down Raphael Street?”

He looked at her in a startled way and then laughed.

“How do you know that? Clairvoyance?”

“Have you been to see that vile woman?”

“Oh, I just looked in for a few minutes. She wanted to consult me about some investments. I couldn’t very well refuse. Besides she’s quite amusing.”

Things like that. Lies like that. What was she going to do about it? What was going to be the end of it? She was getting frightened—frightened of the dreadful possibility that she had made a complete mess of her life by marrying a man she could not respect and could not trust and—was that to be the end of it?—could not love. It would be very horrible to be tied to a man when love had gone. It would be a living hell. Why hadn’t she listened to her friends who had warned her against him? Even that girl Marjorie, sitting next to her father, had warned her and advised her to ‘chuck’ Julian. She had been very angry then. She had been angry with Kit for a time, her loyal friend showing his loyalty now by coming to see her and putting passion on one side.

“You’re silent, my dear,” said her father. “Are you bored?”

“Not in the least,” she assured him. “That last scene was exquisite.”

“I saw Pavlova in it,” said her father. “The only Pavlova and a thing of beauty, perfect in grace and art. But then I was young. One is more enthusiastic in youth. That’s why I like the company of young people.”

They drove Marjorie back to Battersea Park.

“Cinderella goes back to her rags,” she told them. “Never mind, I’ve had a lovely time. Thanks a lot. My boy friends will be jealous of me.”

She kissed Pamela, waggled her fingers at Lord Bramley, and made a dash for the flights of stone stairs leading to her father’s flat.

“A high-spirited child,” was Lord Bramley’s comment, “but there’s a lot of sense in her head.”

CHAPTER XXIX

Pamela took Julian down to Church Hampden for a week-end visit. He pretended to regard this as a dreadful bore but inwardly he was excited at the idea of going to her family home and meeting her formidable mother. She could tell that by the care with which he chose what he would wear. He had a marvellous assortment of silk ties and socks and spent some time selecting the right ones to go with a new grey suit.

“Don’t make yourself too smart,” she warned him. “We all dress like tramps in the country.”

“Shall we meet any of the local gentry?” he asked. “If so they’ll expect me to look decent, won’t they?”

“Decent but not dressy,” she told him. “Those fancy socks will alarm them. And anyhow I can’t think where you get the coupons for them.”

“Oh, that’s easy,” he answered carelessly. “There’s a regular traffic in them.”

“Black Market?” she asked.

He nodded.

“Of course! How do you like these?”

“I don’t like them. They’ll make you look like a film star, especially with that tie. Julian, put on a pair of old bags and a frayed shirt. Honest folk don’t dress like tailors’ advertisements nowadays. Shabbiness is the fashion now.”

“Oh, I’ll try to look like a little gentleman,” he answered. “I want to make a good impression on your lady mother and the local dowagers. I shouldn’t feel my best in baggy trousers and the wrong kind of tie.”

He was over-dressed, she thought, but he made a good impression on her mother and Henriette. Pamela was secretly amused by the spell he put upon them almost instantly by his good looks and charming manner. She was amused but critical and distressed. He had put that spell on her. She had gone mad about him. Now she knew that this charm of manner was a pose and that the magic he had for all women was just physical and animal. He was an actor playing a part. It was all false. He was a charlatan. There was nothing true about him except his beauty.

“So, you’re Julian!” said Lady Bramley after a searching look at him, at first with cold eyes which softened when he took her hand and raised it to his lips.

“The unfortunate Julian,” he admitted.

“Why unfortunate?” asked Lady Bramley.

“Because your ladyship has a grudge against me as the son of my father. I plead guilty to that but it’s not really my fault.”

This went down well with his mother-in-law but it didn’t go down well with Pamela. He was disloyal to his father who had been very generous to him.

Lady Bramley laughed good-naturedly.

“Well, I confess I was much annoyed at first. I’ve no love for Trade Union leaders and Labour members who are dragging this country down to ruin. But I understand you’re on our side. That makes a difference.”

“I’m not much of a politician,” said Julian with assumed modesty, “but I regard the Labour Party as——”

Pamela was certain that he was going to say ‘a bunch of crooks’. It was a favourite phrase of his, but he may have decided that such words might shock his noble mother-in-law and he substituted a milder phrase—“Misguided and fanatical”.

“Hear, hear!” cried Lady Bramley. “The sooner this country pushes them out the better. It’s terrible for you to have a father on the Labour benches. It must be a great handicap to you.”

“Mother!” exclaimed Pamela. “That’s a horrible thing to say. Julian is Stephen Inchbold’s son and he ought to be proud of it.”

Lady Bramley looked at her with astonishment and reproof.

“Don’t tell me what I ought to say and what I ought not to say, child. Why should your husband be proud of having a Socialist father in a Government which he admits is misguided and fanatical?”

“Julian’s father started from nothing,” said Pamela. “He had to earn his living before he was thirteen. He studied at night classes. He became a leader of the men. He’s now in Parliament. If I had a father like that and if I remembered all I owed to him I should be proud. I shouldn’t deny him as Peter denied Christ.”

“The child has gone mad!” exclaimed Lady Bramley.

“Oh, Pam has peculiar ideas on this subject,” said Julian laughingly. “We have little tiffs about it.”

“One day we shall have a quarrel about it,” said Pamela warningly. “I believe in loyalty.”

She met Julian’s eyes with a challenging look. She read what he was saying with his eyes—“Leave my father out of it. Don’t tell the world that he started life at the bottom of the ladder.”

It was then that Henriette came into the drawing-room and Pamela saw her startled look at the first sight of Julian. Before they went in to lunch she caught hold of Pamela’s arm and whispered: “Your husband is very beautiful. *Toutes mes félicitations*.”

“Thanks, Henriette,” said Pamela.

Nigel came down to lunch with the aid of his sticks and Robin Melville joined them. Pamela saw her brother’s searching glance on Julian several times during luncheon, and once his eyes met hers and she coloured up hotly for she saw in his look a little amusement and a little pity.

Julian was talking a good deal, mostly to Lady Bramley and Henriette. He was bringing in the names of titled people whom he had met during the War, or said he had met. Had he met them? Were they friends of his, as he claimed? Pamela was uncertain about it. In one case he was questioned by Robin Melville, not with any suspicion or hostility, but on a point of fact.

“Young Bingley—Major Lord Bingley, you know, was with my crowd in Italy. We were very nearly captured together outside Florence. An amusing chap. He spoke Italian fluently and that helped us to escape disguised as Italian peasants. He wants me to go and stay with him at his place in Sussex.”

“Hampshire,” said Robin Melville.

Julian’s eyes blinked for a moment.

“Oh, Hampshire, is it?”

“I’m surprised to hear he speaks fluent Italian,” said Melville. “He’s a cousin of mine and no linguist as far as I know. His French accent is atrocious.”

“Oh, he picked it up in no time,” said Julian. Then he switched to another subject by asking Henriette if she liked riding. He was very keen on it himself, he said.

Was there any truth, thought Pamela, in that story about Robin’s cousin?

Was there any truth in any of his stories? Did he think that her mother and others at this table would be impressed because he knew a few titled people? How absurd, how childish, and how false of him! He said he was very keen on riding but she was almost certain that he had never ridden in his life. How could he have done as the son of a railway man in Rugby? When Lady Bramley suggested that Colonel Lingfield, their neighbour, would be delighted to bring round a couple of horses if he would care to go riding with Pamela he hurriedly pleaded that he had strained himself lately by lifting a heavy box and wouldn't care to risk riding just yet.

"Why didn't you tell me you had strained yourself, Julian?" asked Pamela. "It's the first I've heard of it."

"Oh, I don't fuss about small things like that."

It was a lie. She knew it was a lie. And this talk about riding was a fairy-tale. He had never put a leg over a horse in his life. She felt quite sure of that.

'He's false all through,' she thought. 'It's vanity which makes him false. He's acting a part all the time. I wish I hadn't brought him home. Nigel sees through him. Nigel pities me. Dear God, have pity on me too! How am I going to live with this charlatan, this beautiful humbug?'

Her father was at dinner that evening and after a friendly greeting to Julian sat rather silent and preoccupied. Julian was doing his spell-binding tricks with Henriette and was being very sweet to his mother-in-law, agreeing with everything she said about the political situation and the dreadful state of the country.

"We shall know more about it on Budget day," said Julian. "I fear the worst. Of course I'm against all this austerity. It gets the people down. Don't you agree, sir?"

He looked over at his father-in-law as though wishing him to join in the conversation.

Lord Bramley smiled and gave a sigh which was half a groan.

"I don't see any alternative to austerity," he said. "We can't spend what we haven't got. We must keep up this export drive to buy our daily bread and the other raw materials of life."

"Isn't that rather a fallacy?" asked Julian. "If we took off the controls and gave private enterprise a free hand we should soon be out of this mess."

He proceeded to lay down the law in an airy way as though he were under the impression perhaps that he was pleasing his wife's family out of whose

circle he had been kept so long. It was his wife who rebuked him. Suddenly she felt exasperated by Julian's glib talk about economics and finance, his self-assurance and dogmatism in the presence of her father who had held many high offices of state.

"Julian," she said, "aren't you talking nonsense? In any case have you forgotten that my father was once Chancellor of the Exchequer and knows a good deal about these things?"

"Oh, sorry!" said Julian, suddenly disconcerted. "Yes, of course."

He was put at his ease instantly by his father-in-law.

"No, no! I know very little about these things. They're all dark mysteries to me. Everything has changed since I held office. Go ahead, Julian. I'm interested in what you say though I don't agree with some of it."

"I find it vastly interesting," said Lady Bramley graciously. She looked over at Pamela and raised her forefinger.

"You're a naughty creature, Pam. Young wives should be appreciative of their husbands and not interrupt their flow of talk."

After dinner Pamela followed her father into his study and shut the door.

"Father," she said, "wasn't Julian talking great nonsense?"

Lord Bramley smiled at her and held her ear.

"Quite a lot of nonsense. But that's the privilege of youth and most of us do a lot of that however old we are. I know I do!"

"You're too generous, Father," said Pamela. "You're too kind."

Suddenly she clasped his arms and put her head down on his chest and to his surprise and alarm wept bitterly.

"My dear Pam! My dear child! What's the matter? What's gone wrong?"

Presently she pulled herself together a little and sobbed out some words.

"I've made a mess of things. My marriage is a mess. Julian is a rotter."

Lord Bramley was staggered by those words and much distressed.

"My poor Pam!" he exclaimed. "Not as bad as that I hope."

Pamela dried her eyes and gave a pitiful laugh.

"I've made my bed. I suppose I must lie on it. I can't say I wasn't warned."

"Can't you make a go of it?" asked her father. "The first years of marriage

are apt to be difficult. Two personalities have to adjust themselves to each other. That’s not easy sometimes if they happen to have character and strong wills. Your mother and I—well, it’s generally a question of give and take.”

“Julian takes and doesn’t give,” said Pamela.

Lord Bramley was silent for a moment. He held one of Pamela’s hands and raised it to his lips.

“Try to stick it out,” he said. “Broken marriages mean broken hearts. Nobody is perfect. One has to realize that. Sometimes young wives expect perfection. Before marriage they tend to idealize their men and then are miserably disillusioned when they can’t live up to this ideal. That’s a platitude, but it’s true, I think.”

Pamela dabbed her eyes with a handkerchief and tried to smile.

“I didn’t idealize Julian. But I expected him to behave rather better than a cad.”

Her father raised his eyebrows, shocked by this bitterness.

“Isn’t that a bit too hard on him, my dear? He has made a good impression on your mother who is not easily taken in.”

Pamela gave a little mirthless laugh.

“He exploits his good looks. He has a perfect technique with women, old or young. It’s all sham. What do you think of him, Father? Tell me honestly.”

Lord Bramley hesitated and then smiled at his daughter.

“An awkward question, Pam. He’s your husband.”

“That means you see through him,” she answered. “I knew you did, Father, from the very first time I brought him to you.”

“I knew he was not quite sure of himself,” said her father. “He throws himself about a bit I admit. That’s due to an inferiority complex, I expect. He talks too much, perhaps, and is not always accurate in what he says.”

Pamela laughed again but it wasn’t a happy laugh.

“That’s an understatement, Father! He’s incapable of telling the truth. He lies and lies even to me.”

Lord Bramley was silent again. His daughter had revealed more than a temporary quarrel between husband and wife. This was a fundamental break—a very dreadful smash in human relationship.

“Look here, Pam,” he said, “you’ll have to work this out for yourself. I’m afraid it will cost you a good deal of agony. No advice of mine is any good to you. It’s between you and your husband. Perhaps you can effect some working compromise—a sense of humour sometimes helps and you have a lot of that. There’s another thing that helps—pity. *Tout savoir c’est tout pardonner.* Your husband’s faults may be due to things beyond his own control, something in his blood, too much imagination, an inferiority complex due to a poverty-stricken childhood, a resentment against society because of a stern father in childhood, or the desperate urge to climb beyond his humble conditions of life in boyhood. *Tout savoir c’est tout pardonner.* A profound truth in that. It’s the Christian ethic, really. Am I talking nonsense?”

He broke off and looked at his daughter with a smiling tenderness.

“Not nonsense, Father,” she answered, “but nothing that applies to me and Julian. I can’t tolerate lies. I can’t tolerate dishonesty. I can’t tolerate married life with a beautiful animal who has no morality and no sense of honour.”

She wept again and then spoke in a voice of anguish.

“I called him my Greek faun. I loved him for his body. I walked open-eyed into a soulless marriage. It serves me right, Father. I’ve no right to complain. I asked for it. I was a headstrong little fool.”

Lord Bramley drooped his head and groaned.

“I’m sorry,” he said. “I’m sorry, Pam.”

Pamela rose and kissed him again.

“I oughtn’t to have worried you with all this,” she said, “I expect you’re worrying about world affairs and the crisis at home. That’s quite enough for you, goodness knows! As you say, this affair is between me and Julian. I shall have to go through with it.”

She left the study and went up to Nigel’s work-room for a talk which did not include any reference to Julian or married unhappiness.

That night in their bedroom Julian looked at her and said: “What’s the matter? Are you feeling unwell?”

“I’m all right,” she answered.

“You look peeved,” said Julian. “Have I dropped any bricks?”

“I didn’t hear any.”

“I’ve won over your mother, anyhow,” he said with a laugh. “She feeds out of my hand. Quite tame!”

Pamela did not answer and suddenly Julian spoke to her angrily.

“What the devil’s the matter with you? Ever since we’ve arrived you’ve given me the frozen face as though you were ashamed of me. And you’ve contradicted me several times before your family. I don’t like it. It’s not playing the game.”

Pamela laughed quietly and satirically.

“I didn’t know you were an authority on playing the game. When I’ve used that phrase you’ve always jeered.”

“There you go again! And I don’t like the way you look at me sometimes as though I were a leper or a moral pervert. Haven’t I given you a good time?”

“Don’t let’s get into an argument,” said Pamela wearily. “I’m sleepy. I’m going to bed.”

She pretended to be asleep before he came in from the bathroom where she heard him humming to himself and splashing water.

CHAPTER XXX

Nigel stayed late in his work-room that night. His loom was quiet. He was having a fight with his old enemy Pain. For some months he had kept it under by the power of the mind over the body, as he believed, but it had come back on him like seven devils inflicting merry tortures on him, running up and down his spine until he was in a sweat of agony. Several times he spoke aloud as though trying to exorcise evil spirits fighting for possession of his soul.

"Get down, you devils. I've mastered you before. Why do you torture me? O, God! O, God! Take me off this rack. Help me to get outside this body of pain. Liberate me from this torture chamber of the flesh."

He shuddered convulsively and his face was twisted into a mask of pain.

He fell face forward across the table at which he had been sitting with a book in front of him. No one had ever seen him like this, not even Henriette. He had used this work-room as a hiding-place where he could be alone with his enemy. No one knew the battles he had fought here, the ordeal by fire through which he had passed in this room until gradually the visits of his enemy had become less frequent and lately had ceased almost completely. He had believed, he had half believed, that by a mystical faith and practice—it needed practice according to all the mystics—he could free himself from the ills of the body and hurl his spirit as it were beyond the flesh into radiant light of eternal peace. He had had one astounding experience in which this seemed to happen to him. It was in line with the experiences of the great mystics about whom he had been reading. All pain had left him. All consciousness of the body. This work-room had been filled with unearthly light of which he was possessed and interpenetrated. He was as it were one vibration in the eternal radiance, outside time, outside the appearance and shape of the material world itself, composed of pure force and, as it seemed to him, pure joy. Afterwards he had wondered whether all this was a trick of the mind, perhaps an illusion of the disordered mind, in other words madness. No, he could not believe that. If this were madness let him be mad! But it was not madness he was sure. It was a revelation beyond the experience of normal life, beyond the reach perhaps of ordinary religious folk. He was not religious in the ordinary sense. That was the queer thing about it. He had been a sceptic though going to church now and then as a matter of form to please his mother who regarded church-going as a kind of patriotism. It was only this experience of pain which

had forced him to appeal for help outside himself, for rescue out of the fires of hell. Out of pain he had found his way into the radiance of the spirit—if that were not a kind of dream or a kind of mirage.

Tonight his agony passed again. Suddenly he felt a blessed sense of relief. Those devils had departed as suddenly as they had attacked him. He was able to rise and move about. Presently he picked up his two sticks from the floor by the side of his table, put a cloth over his loom, knocked out his pipe against the fireplace and put it in his pocket. Then he turned out the light and went downstairs, making as little noise as possible. It was nearly midnight. Everybody would be in bed.

Henriette was not in bed, as he saw when he opened his bedroom door quietly. One of the bedside lamps was switched on but he saw by a glance that the bed-clothes were undisturbed.

For a few moments he stood there as though thinking and then turned and went out into the passage, lit only by the light from his open door until another door opened letting out another gleam of light. It was Robin Melville's room and a slim figure in a blue dressing-gown crept out. It was Henriette.

She gave a little startled cry as she saw Nigel standing in the dark passage.

"Oh, Nigel," she whispered, "I thought you were upstairs."

"Hush!" he said. "Don't wake everybody."

He followed her into the bedroom and shut the door and switched on another light.

Henriette watched him with a frightened look.

"I saw you come out of Robin's room," he said quietly.

Henriette gave a nervous little laugh.

"Yes! It was quite all right. He has only just come up. I wanted to talk to him. You were so late upstairs."

"I know," he answered. "I had a touch of pain. I had to wait until it passed."

"Oh, sorry, Nigel. Better take one of those pain-killer pills."

He shook his head.

"No, I've chucked those. One can rely too much on dope."

He put his two sticks by the bottom rail of the bed and leaned against it looking at his wife.

“Henriette,” he said, “why don’t you leave that boy alone? Why do you tempt him?”

“What do you mean?” Henriette’s face turned pale but she answered with a kind of defiance.

“You’re making him miserable,” said Nigel. “It’s unfair to him, and he’s such a decent fellow.”

Henriette pretended not to understand him.

“You talk nonsense, Nigel. *C’est idiot. Je ne comprends pas.*”

Nigel looked into her eyes and she turned her head quickly to avoid that look which seemed to pierce below her mask of make-believe. But there was no anger in them.

“I’ve been watching you, my dear,” he said. “For months now you have been making love to Robin and he has tried to resist you because he’s my friend and wants to play straight.”

“You are mad,” said Henriette, faintly. “You deceive yourself.”

Nigel gave her a smile.

“It’s quite likely I’m mad, but not about this. It has been an open book to me for months. You gave yourself away, my dear. You didn’t hide the light in your eyes when Robin came into the room. You laughed with him when I couldn’t make you laugh. You found lots to talk to him about when I couldn’t make you talk, in spite of all my love.”

Henriette’s voice became a little shrill.

“Your love!” she exclaimed. “You go up to that room of yours. You click-clack with your loom. I am here as a prisoner in this big, cold house. What love have you given me?”

“Great love,” he answered simply, “until you hurt me too much by your horror of me.”

“No, no,” cried Henriette. “That is not true, Nigel. I have always been sorry for you. I have always had pity.”

Nigel raised both his hands slightly and when he answered his voice was gentle.

“Pity and—what shall I say?—disgust? I don’t blame you. That’s why I stay alone so much upstairs. I didn’t want to inflict myself on you.”

Henriette began to weep a little.

"It is you who are unfair," she cried. "Did I not break my heart when you came back as a cripple? Do you not understand the shock it was to me to see you so changed?"

"Yes, it was hard luck on you," said Nigel. "I have always felt that. But it wasn't my fault. The Germans had something to do with it. But that's another story. We were talking about Robin. I want you to leave him alone. Please! Promise me!"

Henriette became pale again and was silent for several moments. Then she blurted out some words emotionally.

"I'm sorry, Nigel. Neither of us can help it." She breathed a little noisily and her bosom was heaving. "*C'est la passion!*"

"No!" said Nigel. "He may love you—I think he does—but you're only amusing yourself with him. You're using him as a cure for boredom. You like the adventure of making love to him secretly. He provides the drama for which you crave. It's more amusing because he's frightened of yielding to you. He's my friend and he hates to be disloyal. You're the temptress of his soul which he wants to save and keep unspotted."

"Has he told you?" she asked, wondering how he knew these things.

"Not verbally," said Nigel. "But I see his eyes which have a guilty look when they meet mine. I hear his sighs of which he's quite unconscious. He's tormented by the thought of treachery to me and this family. We've been pretty decent to him."

"He is my lover!" said Henriette. "He burns with love for me."

Nigel looked at her with a kind of pity.

"I'm sorry for him," he said. "If you desert me and run off with him his conscience will suffer hell fire. I know Robin. I've talked with him in time of war when the neighbourhood of death makes men talk straight. He can't sin without self-reproach."

"Sin?" asked Henriette scornfully. "What is sin in our love? It is an English convention. It is *bourgeois* morality."

"A bit old-fashioned, I agree!" answered Nigel with a faint smile. "Nobody bothers about it much nowadays. But Robin Melville is one of the old-fashioned kind. I advise you to leave him in peace. You wouldn't be happy with him because he would be unhappy. I'll tell you what I'm going to do. I want to be honest with you."

“What do you propose to do?” asked Henriette coldly.

“I’m going to get my father to give him the sack for his own sake. It will give him a chance of escape. He hasn’t the strength to break away without someone coming to his rescue.”

Henriette raised her voice.

“No!” she cried. “That’s a dirty trick. I do not allow it. If he goes, I go. I warn you, Nigel. I shall run away from you with Robin. I will never come back.”

Nigel smiled at her with that look of pity in his eyes.

“My dear child, my heart was broken a long time ago.”

Henriette began to weep noisily, sitting on the side of the bed with her hands to her face.

For a moment Nigel watched her and then spoke quietly.

“I’m not blaming you, my dear. I’m not going to cast the first stone, or any stone. I understand. This house, this life here, with a crippled man has been no place for you. You need the joy of life. It’s an urge in your blood. It belongs to your historical tradition of Provence. Blue skies and sunshine, and love and the songs of the troubadours. I don’t forget all that. This marriage with me has been a martyrdom. English country life in time of austerity as they call it is just a cold hell for you. When Robin came along it was, you thought, a chance for romance and love. Do you think I didn’t see all that? I saw the danger to both of you and especially to my friend Robin. I’m not without pity for both of you. I only want to help. The best help is to get Robin away.”

Henriette dried her tears and sprang up from the bed.

“You are heartless,” she cried. “You are utterly selfish. I do not stay another minute with you. I shall sleep downstairs on a sofa.”

“Don’t catch cold,” said Nigel. “Take the eiderdown.”

She did not answer him but went swiftly out of the room with an angry fire in her eyes.

CHAPTER XXXI

THIS red-headed Harington, who was, in his impulsive way, a bit of an idealist, not without brains beneath his carrots, had been busy for some time on a new political plan. After days and months of talk round and about it with friends in the House and out of it, he had put it down in black and white, at first typewritten, now in proof form for publication at his own expense. It would be a heavy expense, somewhat terrifying when he had the estimate, but he was prepared to meet it by selling some stocks and shares at a loss—industrials had slumped heavily of late—and, if need be, by selling a gold cigarette-case given to him by fond parents on his twenty-first birthday, and other useless trifles now of market value. Not that he was in a state of penury. His salary as a Member of Parliament was adequate for the expenses of his position, though he had no great margin for such adventures as the publication of his political ideas.

Not being a born literary man to whom written words come easily, he had had to hammer out every sentence as though carving it out of marble. He had altered every paragraph half a dozen times to give it perfect clarity and conciseness of thought. He had rearranged the text by scissors and paste until it looked like a jigsaw puzzle. Working often until the small hours, he had smoked himself sick with cigarettes and gone to bed with a headache by intensive thought and an ill-ventilated room. He had paced the Embankment after late debates in the House, thinking out a title for his work and the most effective way in which he could get national support for his main idea.

As well he knew, he was not alone in producing a Plan. It was an age of Planning. The Government was doing it all the time and, in his opinion, planning the country to death, by the enormous capital expenditure involved in these social adventures. His own wastepaper-basket was overloaded with Plans from many societies and individuals convinced that they had the perfect recipe for the economic salvation of the country, or for the recovery of a war-stricken world. There were plans for World Federation, for an International Court of Equity, for an International Parliament, for a union of Socialist Trade Unions, for a Liberal International, and many others. Harington had read most of them. Some ran parallel to his own ideas but not along the same line. Some of them were too fanciful and unrealistic in their idealism, and some of them were, he thought, just pitiful nonsense.

His own plan had a more restricted purpose, though it took into account the economic condition of the country, the weakness of its defence against an outside menace and the need for a unity and common defence among those nations still holding fast to a democratic tradition.

Harington's thesis—he refused to call it a plan, hating the word so much over-used and overlaid—was in home affairs the need for a new party. This perhaps was the most interesting part of his argument. He maintained that the old party labels and the old party slogans were outworn and obsolete. The Conservative Party would not relinquish a title which had lost all meaning and moral value except to the extreme Right clinging tenaciously but desperately to a tradition breaking beneath their feet. The younger Conservatives, young in thought if not in age, had abandoned the old party dogma with its defence of property and privilege, its inherited belief that Eton and Balliol, or Harrow and the House, were the only schools of true statemanship. That was putting it with a light touch. Harington conceded that in the Conservative tradition there had been at times a fine quality of purpose and distinguished statesmanship. But now the label did not fit. Their trumpets sounded out of tune and did not stir the soul of the people. The younger Conservative mind had taken over the Liberal tradition. They were in fact Liberals under a false banner.

In a few pages Harington gave an analysis of the Liberal mind and history which he thought was nearest to the mind and tradition of the English, Scottish and Welsh peoples. They preferred instinctively the Middle of the Road. They disliked instinctively violent and dangerous extremes of thought. Throughout the centuries they had followed this line, swinging neither to the extreme right nor the extreme left, avoiding violence and fanaticism, agreeing on decent compromises in a spirit of give and take, tolerance and good will, yet not dug deep in any rut, but moving freely forward when the time called for change. That had been true in the past. So, in his belief, it was true now. He had been up and down the country and had heard many times the remark that the person to whom he was talking was really a Liberal at heart and would vote Liberal if that party had any chance.

It had no chance. It was under divided leadership. It had no funds. Gallant young men could not afford to fight for a lost cause—lost as a political party, but very much alive in the minds of men and women who would vote Conservative because they were afraid of Labour, or who would vote Labour because they could not bring themselves to vote for the Tories.

In the Labour Party itself a split, getting wider, was evident between those who wanted State Socialism in full control of the individual and those who believed in the essential liberties of the individual.

“Here then,” wrote Harington, “there is a common ground of agreement among groups in all three parties—the moderate men, the non-fanatical, the forward-looking minds. Fundamentally it is a belief in liberty which makes them think alike. The present and coming conflict throughout the world is a fight to the death between those who believe in the freedom of the human soul, with a free access to knowledge and a free expression of opinion, and those who deny this faith and conspire to overthrow it in favour of State supremacy. Democracy in Europe is fighting a rearguard action and within the frontiers of the democracies there are many converts to the rival creed.

“In this country the Labour Government is under constant and increasing pressure to extend the range of nationalization, and to establish a governing bureaucracy in full possession of power over the lives and liberties of the people. Post-war conditions of national poverty play into the hands of those who desire this power and the suppression of individual freedom. Month after month new orders and regulations, which may be justified as temporary measures in a time of crisis, encroach still further upon the freedom of the individual until, like Gulliver in Lilliput, he is tied hand and foot by swarms of little men in Government employment. Step by step the country advances towards a Socialist State which is the half-way house to Communism.

“It is a road which leads downhill to the degradation of national character. The independent spirit of the English folk who would not tolerate the tyranny of kings is being snapped by the creeping tyranny of officialdom and State control.

“Inside and outside this country civilization founded upon Christian ethics and faith is challenged by a new Barbarism at war not only against democracy but against the civilized mind itself—the civilized mind with its freedom of thought.

“They are on the march against the soul of civilization. They have occupied many countries from the Baltic to the

Rhine and from the Arctic Ocean to the Adriatic. The peoples of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania with a long heritage have been enslaved. No word comes from the silence of their doom. Jugoslavia, once the liberty-loving Serbians, are under the iron discipline of Communism where all men are serfs. In Italy and France there are strong minorities ready and eager to play the Quisling game. In Greece the defenders of the civilized ideal are only able to hold out by British and American aid, and their frontiers are harassed by raiding attacks instigated and armed by foreign powers.

"In Russia the Men in the Kremlin are preparing for what they believe to be the inevitable war against the Pluto-Democracies, that is to say, against the last defenders of human liberty. No offers of friendship, no appeals for co-operation, have any effect upon their policy or their purpose. It is now clear with a blinding light that all our hopes of reconciliation and understanding have failed and are bound to fail, because these men do not want peace with us nor any truce except for delaying purposes until they are ready with their weapons and new equipment. Even now, after so many warnings and so many proofs, our people do not realize this fact. They still go on hoping, as this writer hoped, that good friendliness with Russia will be answered in the same spirit. Russia spits upon our outstretched hands.

"What is the meaning of this to us? What can we do about it? What strength have we? This island is one of the last strongholds in Europe for the defence of the civilized tradition. If we weaken, as we are weakening, our own civilization will be lost. The civilized mind itself will be suppressed and liquidated by the advance guards of oppressors who will walk through the ruins of our cities and over the bodies of our dead in search of survivors. If we go down there will be no more Europe. The European heritage of civilization will go down and only its ghosts will haunt the ruins of its cathedrals and the rubble-heaps which once were the shrines of its ancient glories."

After this passage Harington came to the root of his argument and to the heart of his Plan—which he refused to call a Plan. Briefly it was a proposal for

the linking up of all moderate-minded and liberal-minded members of the three parties in the next Election, to form a new central party by the name of the Freedom Party. He denounced the party warfare in the House at a time when everything was threatened, including the lives and souls of the people. He deplored the party spite and jealousy exhibited night after night and broadcast to the world. The people, he thought, were sick and tired of all this. They wanted a coalition of the best brains. They wanted a nobler leadership instead of this party bickering. They wanted a truce to the old slogans and the old falsity of party propaganda at a time when they smelt burning and heard from afar the beating of hoofs because the Four Horsemen were getting ready to ride out again. They felt the coldness of lengthening shadows. In the secret chambers of their minds they were frightened. At every tea-table, at every dinner-table, there was talk of war until someone cried out at the horror of it, and said 'Don't let's think about it.' But it was impossible not to think about it, and those who thought behind their papers in third-class carriages despaired, or shrugged their shoulders in disgust, at the party fanaticism of a Parliamentary debate and the party violence of week-end speeches. They wanted a new party and a new leadership.

So Harington wrote, and in the last pages of his document outlined in some detail the ideals which should inspire this new party of his imagination. They would be the champions of freedom. They would be the crusaders of the Christian ideal. They would be the guardians of the civilized heritage of Europe. By the strength of the spirit they would strengthen their own people and give new hope to nations which even now were waiting for a lead from us. This new party—a kind of coalition between the two extremes—would link up with the liberal-thinking forces in France, Italy, the Scandinavian nations, Belgium and Holland, and the western zone of Germany.

It would be a new vitality stirring in a tired nation. It would breathe new life into the old tradition of liberal idealism, dying and almost dead in the Liberal Party itself, but still alive, vaguely and instinctively in the minds of the people. The Freedom Party would revive the old tradition of British liberties for which so many men and women had fought and died, and would go forward with flags flying and with a Cross for their emblem as the defenders of Christendom against the new Barbarism.

That was Harington's literary effort briefly summarized. It had cost him a good deal of thought and labour and more money than he could well afford to get it printed.

A pile of the small slim book entitled *Defence of Freedom* lay in due course upon his desk as the child of his brain under a shock of red hair. He

regarded it with some pride and pleasure, but also with some diffidence and anxiety. What reception would it have from his friends and critics? One night after dinner he spent many hours of laborious toil putting a wrapper round each little volume, sticking it down with a bottle of paste, stamping and addressing it. He sent it to every member of the House of Commons and to every Peer of the Realm. Out of his address-book he selected the names of his most important constituents to whom he sent copies. Out of *Who's Who* he made a list of public people, literary men and women, bishops, archdeacons, canons, and distinguished clergy. The book was just slim enough to get through the mouth of a letter-box and it was in the grey dawn of an April day that Christopher Harington made his first journey with a big wastepaper-basket, laden with his work, to the letter-box at the end of his street. It needed six journeys before he had exhausted his first supply of this manifesto to the world. On the first journey no living creature watched his adventure. Above the tiled roofs and the chimney-pots the pale light of dawn crept up. Paper and litter lay in the gutters. No light glimmered in any window. London was asleep and only Harington, it seemed, walked into its twilight and its silence stealthily as though committing a crime.

On his second journey a black cat from some neighbouring area sidled up and stroked itself against one of his legs.

Having stuffed his books into the gaping mouth of the letter-box he bent down and tickled the cat behind the ear to its obvious pleasure.

"A black cat!" he said aloud. "That means good luck."

On his third journey a young policeman came behind him with silent tread and asked the usual question.

"Well, now, what's all this about? Circulars for betting pools? Out early in the morning, aren't you?"

He grinned good-naturedly at Harington who had been startled by his voice coming suddenly over his shoulder.

"It's all right, Constable. Nothing criminal."

"Books, eh?" said the young Bobby. "Thrillers by any chance? Crime, gentlemen, please! That's the stuff I like. It makes me laugh."

"It's a bit of a thriller," said Harington. "At least I hope so. It's a plot for a new political party to save this country in time of peril."

The young policeman laughed.

"Well, we need a bit of saving! They go on talking the same old tripe in the

House of Commons while things go from bad to worse. It makes me sick. Abusing each other from the front benches while Molotov and Co. spin their spider’s web across the world and get ready for the next war. Why don’t our politicians get together and stop all this Tom Fool stuff?”

“Great Jupiter!” exclaimed Harington. “That’s the text of my book. You’ve said it. I’ve written ten thousand words to say what you’ve put into ten sentences.”

“Is that so?” said the young Bobby, not thrown off his balance by this tribute to his wisdom. “Well, you can take it from me that a lot of people think the same.”

“I’m glad to hear it,” said Harington. “I expect you fellows know a good deal about the way people are thinking.”

The young Bobby grinned again.

“Lord, yes! Everybody likes to yap to us—some with propaganda motives like crypto-Communists who try to seduce us from our sense of duty and talk about the loveliness of life under the Soviet system—I don’t think! There’s a lot of that about, especially in the East End, but it doesn’t cut no ice with the ordinary folk. Well, I must be getting along to the end of my beat and a bit of breakfast, you know. Good luck to the book, if anybody’s going to read it.”

Those last words were not cheering to an author despatching his winged words at dawn. Harington gave an uneasy laugh to himself and spoke aloud.

“If anybody is going to read it! I wonder. Perhaps it’ll go from one wastepaper-basket to another!”

CHAPTER XXXII

Among the distinguished people who received Harington's small volume was Pamela's father. He carried it off to his study from the breakfast-table, telling Melville to get on with some work in his own room. Then he read it from cover to cover with a smile playing about his lips at first because he saw the personality of its author behind the printed words—that red-headed fire-brand who talked too much and sometimes through his hat, and had a passionate intensity which led him into exaggeration of argument and over-emphasis. Having read it once Lord Bramley read it again. The fellow had done this job rather well, he thought, and it was in line with his own ideas. Some of Harington's phrases were arresting. He had marshalled his argument well and avoided political passion or any falsity in his presentation of fact.

"Not bad!" said Lord Bramley aloud. "I didn't think he had it in him."

After this verdict he wrote a line on a piece of notepaper—*What do you think of this?*—put it into the slim book, found an envelope big enough to hold it and addressed it to Mrs. Bosanquet. It would be posted by Melville with other letters.

This done, he was about to settle down to *The Times* when there was a tap at his door followed by Nigel who smiled at his father and said, "Busy?"

"Come in, my dear fellow," said Lord Bramley. "Make yourself comfortable. Put on a pipe."

Nigel came across the room with the aid of his sticks and then dropped into a leather chair.

"A good work-shop, this room!" he remarked. "It must be stored with intellectual vibrations."

He grinned at his father as he fumbled for a pipe in his pocket.

"Pretty feeble vibrations from my intellect!" answered Lord Bramley. "But a lot of clever fellows have sat in this room, most of them talking a donkey's hind leg off—Lloyd George, Winston, F. E. Smith, Bernard Shaw, Galsworthy, to say nothing of bishops, diplomats and politicians of all shades. Yes, this old room of mine has heard many brilliant monologues and heated arguments."

Nigel gave a quiet and ironical laugh.

“All their brilliance didn’t save us from World War One and World War Two. Nor from the abyss into which humanity has now fallen.”

“That’s true.” His father agreed and gave a groan. “We’ve made a pretty mess of things. The forces of Evil were too strong for us.”

“Any chance of thrusting them back?” asked Nigel. “They seem to be on the rampage.”

Lord Bramley raised his hands as though in despair.

“The spirit of evil—we used to call it the Devil—is having many victories just now. Very astonishing! But in the long run——”

“Yes,” said Nigel. “Perhaps God wins the last battle—like the English.”

He smiled at his father again.

“That sounds irreverent but I believe in the ultimate victory over the evil powers.”

“That’s my faith,” agreed his father. “If I lost that I should give up all hope.”

There were a few moments of silence between father and son until Nigel spoke again.

“Coming down from the sublime to the ridiculous, I want to consult you about Robin Melville.”

“Is he ridiculous?” Lord Bramley raised his eyebrows and smiled. “I admit he’s a queer fellow, born under a melancholy star, but he’s a hard worker and does his job for me very well.”

“I want you to give him the sack,” said Nigel.

His father was astonished at these words and sat back in his chair in a startled way.

“My dear fellow! Why do you say that? I hate giving anybody the sack and certainly not a man who serves me with devotion.”

Nigel answered after a pause.

“It’s for his own sake. He must get away from here to save his soul.”

Lord Bramley looked at his son completely mystified.

“You speak in riddles, my dear fellow. What’s gone wrong with Melville’s

soul?”

Nigel was silent again and then gave a nervous laugh.

“It’s not very easy to tell you, Father. But you’d better know.”

Lord Bramley’s eyes twinkled, not taking this seriously.

“Has Melville taken to drink or drugs? Has he fallen in love with the Vicar’s wife or become a crypto-Communist?”

“He’s in love with Henriette,” said Nigel. “I don’t blame him for that. I blame Henriette. She flings herself at him. Well, I don’t even blame her, poor kid. I’m no use to her. It’s no fun to be married to a cripple. There’s no fun anyhow in this old house on meagre rations and as cold as death in winter. Henriette comes from Provence and has its blood in her veins. She wants colour, romance, and a singing heart. Robin happened to be handy. Those two children were bound to fall in love. I watched it happen. At first I felt like death about it—it was a case of green-eyed jealousy. Henriette was everything to me once. I had seven devils inside me when I first became aware of their secret passion for one another. Then something happened inside my brain—a kind of resignation, a kind of pity, an understanding. I’ve no grudge against either of them now. I’m sorry most of all for Robin. He has a sense of guilt. He is my best friend. It’s not easy or pleasant to betray one’s best friend. That’s why he’s tortured. That’s why he ought to get away from a temptation beyond his strength to resist. We must help him to do a bunk. That’s why I want you to give him the sack. Do you see what I mean?”

Lord Bramley had listened to his son with a sense of stupefaction. He had had no idea of all this. It had been happening under his nose but he had suspected nothing. ‘That little hussy, Henriette,’ he thought, ‘that little slut, can’t she be loyal to a husband like Nigel who has been smashed up in his country’s service? She ought to have gone down on her knees before him. She ought to have given him a loving pity and devotion. He needed her more than most men need a woman’s cherishing. It was damn’ bad of her to use her wiles with Melville and seduce him into treachery. No wonder the fellow has looked so miserable and haunted lately.’

“All this is very tragic,” he said. “My dear boy, I’m so sorry. I had no idea. I’m shocked at Henriette. I’m shocked at Melville.”

Nigel shook his head and laughed.

“No use being shocked, Father. Juxtaposition is the very deuce. Robin is a romantic. He’s a poet and a sentimentalist. He was an easy victim of Henriette’s desire for passionate adventure. I can understand all that. When I

was upstairs, with the eternal click-clack of my loom, what was Henriette to do, poor kid? Where was her escape from the boredom? She found her cripple upstairs rather horrible—a living reminder of all she has missed, a maimed and mangled man fighting against pain. Here in your room, often alone, was good-looking Robin, shy Robin who blushed when she spoke to him, the poet Robin who loved beauty and saw it in her eyes. What could either of them do about it? These babes in the wood!"

Lord Bramley looked at his son with tenderness and pity.

"It's hard on you," he said. "It's devilish hard. You deserve much more than this. Fate has been unkind to you, dear lad."

Nigel gave a quiet laugh and there was no bitterness in the sound of it.

"I've got over the agony," he said, "and I'm pretty thankful to Fate. I'm learning the technique of fatalism, plus faith. I'm not ready to talk about it yet, but in a queer way I can get outside myself. I mean I can take everything that happens with a certain indifference as a small affair incidental to this life on earth and of no permanent importance. It's like looking down from a star, or getting outside time and seeing the past and the present and the future as one whole, all together, as it were. I admit it's rather oriental, this indifference to the accidents of life, this escape from the flesh, as it were. I'm reading a bit about that. I'm groping my way towards something of the kind. You'll think I'm talking like a lunatic!"

"All that's beyond me," said his father. "I'm a man of simple faith. I'm a man of simple mind. Metaphysics, theosophy and all that are far beyond me. But in this case of Henriette I'm bound to say that I'm horrified by her disloyalty and selfishness. It's not in my code or creed. I shall find it difficult to sit at table with her. I'll never play cribbage with her again."

Nigel laughed at him and he smiled in answer, realizing that his refusal to play cribbage with Henriette was inadequate to the tragedy of the situation.

"I shall have to think it out," he said. "I hate the idea of telling Melville to go, though perhaps that'd be the kindest thing. If I do I shall have to tell him why. That would be only fair."

"Yes," agreed Nigel. "He'll take it from you. Well, Father, that's how it stands. I had to tell you. Now I'll go back to my work-room. So long!"

"Heaven help us all, my dear boy," said his father with half a laugh and half a groan. "Pam isn't very happy either, poor darling. Well, I'll see you at lunch."

CHAPTER XXXIII

CONVERSATION at lunch was kept up mostly by Julian and Lady Bramley. Julian had regained his good humour and was telling some of his stories. Henriette was silent and looked unhappy. She had had a restless and chilly night in the drawing-room where she had tried to sleep on a sofa with a rug which kept slipping off. Now she felt very sorry for herself. Robin Melville did not speak a word during luncheon and looked a picture of melancholy.

Pamela was not conversational but felt the strain of this silence at her end of the table and broke it by discussing a book with her father.

After lunch everybody scattered. Lord Bramley went for his usual walk; his wife announced that she had letters to write in her room but that was generally known to mean what she called 'forty winks'; Nigel went up to his work-room. Henriette disappeared after a whispered word with Melville.

Julian felt at a loose end without an audience.

"What are you doing, Pam?" he asked, forgetting his ill-humour with her. "What about a stroll round Church Hampden? Is there anything to see in the way of local antiquities or the stately homes of England?"

It was a friendly invitation, made with smiling eyes, and Pamela was aware that he could still put his charm upon her. She had called him hard names to her father, she had lost all faith in his integrity, but almost against her will she softened towards him and felt some touch of tenderness. Her love was not yet stone dead, she thought. If only Julian would play straight...

"I'll take you to tea with some people who live in one of the oldest houses in England—part of it going back to Norman times. Would that amuse you? They have some wonderful treasures, all in rags and tatters."

"It sounds amusing," agreed Julian. "Who are the people?"

"Old friends of ours," said Pamela. "Sir Arthur Campion and his little slip of a wife. They're almost as old as the house, but a very sweet old couple."

"Well, for lack of anything else..." said Julian good-humouredly. Perhaps he wanted to make amends for his annoyance last night when he had been rough with her.

"Let's walk there," said Pamela. "Three miles and a half."

The house was quiet when they had started on this walk. There was no one in the grounds of Longacre until Henriette came out of a side door, slipped through the rose garden and down a path across a meadow and went quickly to a summer-house, leaky and weather-worn after years of disuse.

"Are you there, Robin?" she called out when she was ten yards away. He came out of the summer-house, and she flung herself into his arms, kissing his face and lips.

"Robin, we are found out," she cried. "Nigel saw me coming out of your room last night. I told him that I loved you. I told him that you loved me. *Qu'est-ce-qu'il faut faire?*"

Melville had held her in his arms but he now released her and stood back a little and passed the back of his hand across his forehead.

"This is terrible," he said in a low voice; "it was bound to happen, of course. I warned you a thousand times. I begged you not to come into my room."

"You are very timid, my little rabbit!" said Henriette. She laughed gaily, but with a touch of bravado.

"*Je m'en fiche!* What does it matter that Nigel knows? It is better so. It is more honest. Now you will have to be brave, my little one."

Melville spoke in a broken voice.

"He was my friend. I have betrayed him."

Henriette held one of his hands and raised it to her lips.

"Love is more beautiful than friendship," she said. "Nigel understands. He understands perfectly. He knows how great was our temptation. He forgives."

Melville gave a groan of anguish.

"It's terrible. People talk about robbing a blind man, but I've done worse. I've betrayed a man smashed up in the War who was my friend. It's unforgivable. Henriette, my dear, why did you make me love you?"

A sudden anger flashed into her eyes.

"That is not a very beautiful thing to say," she answered. "You make me out the temptress, the bad woman who put the spell of Circe upon an innocent young man. Hippolytus and Phaedra! Did you not make eyes at me? Did you not tell me with your eyes that you loved me? Was it not in answer to your eyes that I came to you? I was sorry for you. I had pity for you because of your shyness and your loneliness—the poor drudge of my father-in-law, the slave of

this old tyrant who has worked you to death. Now you ask why did I tempt you! Did not Adam ask that of Eve? Are men all cowards from the beginning of time? Robin, do not be *lâche*. Do not be a coward. I implore you.”

Melville had turned very white. There was anguish in his voice when he answered.

“I love you most frightfully, Henriette, and the more I love you the more I hate myself.”

“That is absurd!” cried Henriette. “It is *idiot*!”

She laughed in a shrill hysterical way and then, as though forgetting English, spoke in rapid French.

“It’s the English conscience. It’s what makes Englishmen so incomprehensible to the French mind. They are haunted by this miserable conscience which is a heritage from their Puritan forefathers, they enjoy themselves sadly. Sometimes they go wild and do gay, mad things until suddenly their conscience speaks and they are ashamed. They make love to a woman when their cold blood is heated by passion. When they have her in their arms suddenly they get cold again and push her away because they have a sense of guilt. I have been told that. I have read it in books. It is true. It is the same with you, Robin. You push me away. You recoil from me. I have given my love to a frozen lover. The English conscience haunts you like a demon.”

Melville listened to this outburst in French and answered in English.

“I love you. I love you with all my heart and soul and I hate myself for loving you because I betray Nigel.”

Henriette stared at him and cried out angrily: “Are you going to betray me also? Are you going to be false to your love, if it is love?”

Melville avoided her eyes. His voice was faint when he answered.

“This tears me to pieces.”

He gave a kind of sob and put both his arms over his eyes.

Henriette flung herself at him and held to his grey flannel jacket, weeping and crying out.

“*Mon bien-aimé! Je t’aime. Il faut avoir du courage! Il ne faut pas être effrayé.*”

He put his arms down from his face and held her close, kissing her hair and putting his cheek against hers. It was a cheek wet with tears.

“We must go away, my Robin!” cried Henriette. “You must take me away. We must go today.”

He answered her in a broken voice.

“It’s for me to go alone. That’s the only way. It’s the decent way.”

Henriette gave a sharp cry of distress like a wounded creature.

“If you go without me, Robin, I die. It would kill me. Are you cruel enough to kill me?”

“I must go alone,” he said again.

Henriette clung to him.

“I will not let you go. Do you wish to throw my love away? Do you throw me away like an old shoe or a dead bird that you have killed?”

“It’s best for me to go alone,” he said again. “I’ll go tonight—this must be our good-bye. I’m sure of it. It’s the only way. Henriette, help me now. Give me your last kiss.”

He had put his arms about her but she struggled away from him and there was a fire of scorn and anger in her eyes.

“You are false!” she cried. “If you go you are a coward! I will hate you. I will despise you. *Lâche! Lâche!*”

Suddenly she flung herself on to the grass with her face downwards and her body shaken by sobs.

Melville went down on his knees by her side. “You tear my heart out,” he said. “Don’t weep like that, for God’s sake, Henriette!”

“Leave me!” she cried in a stifled voice with her face still in the long wet grass outside the old summer-house. “Go away! I hate you.”

He stood up, looking down at her. His face was a dead white and he seemed stricken dumb. Then he knelt by her. Once he kissed her hair. At his touch she sprang up from the grass and fled down the path towards the house.

Melville called after her in a strangled voice:

“Henriette! Henriette!”

She did not turn her head and disappeared behind the tall hedge of blue cypresses.

For a minute or more Robin Melville stood motionless as though turned to stone. Then he walked slowly down a track through a copse in which a cuckoo

was calling on this day in April. The sun glinted through the young trees now shimmering with the first green of the year. The ground was soggy underneath his feet but the leafy ground was spangled here and there with clumps of primroses and the blackthorn was white with blossom.

At other times Robin Melville, secret poet, would have noticed the beauty around him, the play of light through the trees, the crinkled gold of the dead leaves, and the little green flames on the boughs. He would have heard with ecstasy the first shout of the cuckoo and the piping notes of other birds, but now he walked with blind eyes and deaf ears. A bramble tore the back of his right hand drawing blood, but he was unaware of it. Beyond the copse was the small lake where sometimes he had gone fishing when Lord Bramley had given him an afternoon off. He sat on a fallen log. Once from this seat he had made a water-colour sketch which Henriette had thought marvellous.

Now he sat down on the log with his hands hanging between his knees and his head drooping, tortured because of a tragic pull between passion and honour.

Once he spoke aloud, startling a yaffle pecking at a tree nearby.

“I must go alone.”

Through the copse came a mocking cry, “Cuckoo! Cuckoo!”

CHAPTER XXXIV

Lord Bramley had a talk that afternoon with Julia Bosanquet. They did not go into her low-ceilinged sitting-room but sat in her garden in a sheltered corner with the sun on them. The strip of crazy paving to the cottage door was bordered with aubrietia and a row of tall tulips just in bloom. In a little orchard beyond the lawn the fruit trees were white with blossom.

“Out too early!” was Lord Bramley’s comment. “Sure to be nipped by a late frost.”

“Pessimist!” exclaimed Mrs. Bosanquet.

“The pessimism of painful experience,” he answered. “Still I must say the April sunshine is very enjoyable and your garden is looking charming. I like to sit here warming my old bones and refreshing my antique spirit.”

She smiled at him from her garden chair.

“You always make a point of emphasizing—and exaggerating—the number of your years. I wonder why?”

“Sheer honesty,” he told her, “and perhaps a reminder to myself and you, my dear, that I’m old enough to spend an hour with a pretty woman without playing the part of an elderly amorist.”

“No need of any such reminder,” she told him. “I believe in friendship for its own sake. If people have nasty minds it’s their misfortune.”

“Did you read that slim book by Christopher Harington?” he asked presently.

Mrs. Bosanquet nodded.

“Yes, indeed. With agreement and admiration. I wish you could make it happen—that new centre party—the Freedom Party. I like his idea about a new crusade in defence of civilization against the advancing tide of Communism.”

“Still advancing!” said Lord Bramley. “They’re playing a sinister game in Berlin with those road blocks and obstructions. They want to make our position untenable and they’re pretending to the German people that they are the champions of German unity. It’s clever propaganda. If there’s one thing the German mind abhors it’s the partition of their country.”

Mrs. Bosanquet was silent for a little while looking at her apple blossom and this picture in her eyes of an English garden exquisite in the first beauty of spring.

"I want to ask you a terrible question," she said presently.

Lord Bramley raised his eyebrows, those eyebrows which had delighted the caricaturists when he was a Minister of the Crown.

"Terrible? On a day like this in this little paradise?"

"Terrible because of it," she answered. "Terrible because I should break my heart if I had to leave this English cottage and garden which I love so much."

"Leave it?" he exclaimed, with a look of consternation.

"For the children's sake," she said. "Do you think I ought to hop it with them?"

"Hop it?"

"Do a bunk," she said. "Leave England while the going's good, or at least while there's a chance of escape? I'm scared. I've been getting letters from American friends. In every one of them they talk about the coming war as though it were near at hand and quite inevitable. Four years is the longest they give it."

"Don't get into a panic, my dear," said Lord Bramley. "Don't get frightened by this war of nerves. Of course we're all a bit alarmed by this creeping shadow in the background of our minds. I am, I admit, but we mustn't let it get us down."

"I want to ask you that terrible question," said Mrs. Bosanquet, "and I know you will give me a straight answer because always you're intellectually honest."

"Not always!" he answered with a smile. "What's the question, my dear? Haven't you asked it?"

"Yes," she said. "Do you think this war is coming? And if so do you think I ought to take the two children away? I could get to South Africa, I have a brother there. He offers us a home."

Because he did not answer but poked his stick into a crack between the crazy paving she spoke again.

"If it were a question of myself alone I should stay here whatever happened. I would rather die in England than live away from it. But every time

I look at the two children I think that perhaps I ought to save them from coming horrors if those are going to come. Tell me the truth, my dear."

Lord Bramley, the Old Man as they called him in the village, gave a tragic kind of laugh.

"I can't tell you any more truth than you can get out of a penny paper. I know nothing more than you do. The Foreign Secretary knows nothing more, with all his reports and secret information. We can't get inside the skulls of those few men in Moscow who control and shape the policy of the Soviet Union. All one can do is to examine the evidence one has and try to read its riddle with the help of elementary psychology and historical experience."

"I can't do that," said Julia Bosanquet. "That's beyond me. That's why I appeal to you."

"My dear child!" protested Lord Bramley. "I'm not a very wise old bird. Don't believe anything I say. I was wrong last time about Germany. I backed Chamberlain's mission to Munich, as most of us did until it failed. So what can I say now with any certainty? But this I will say, I don't believe Russia is ready for another war. I don't believe her rulers want it. They don't see the need of it. They're fighting a cold war without firing a shot and getting on with it very nicely from their point of view, out-manœuvring the democracies and one step ahead of them in political strategy—except for the Marshall Plan which they have tried to frustrate. The greatest chance of an explosion is the possibility that the Americans may lose patience and that some trivial and tragic incident may set the heath on fire. But there are cool heads in the American administration. Marshall himself is not going to be jumped into anything rash. If the Western democracies work together as they are now pledged to do, and if they can make a go of European recovery on this side of the Iron Curtain, our present fears may be thrust back and the shadow over our minds lifted. Russia will respect strength where previously she has found weakness. The fight of ideas will go on. There can be no real truce between their ideas of life and ours. But in your lifetime—mine is nearly over—there may be no trembling of the earth by high explosive forces. I don't believe you need take flight with your young birds. Anyhow, there's time ahead yet."

Mrs. Bosanquet listened attentively to these measured words and a look of relief came into her eyes.

"Thank you," she said. "And now I feel ashamed of having shown the white feather. But there's so much talk about a coming war that it gets me down sometimes."

The Old Man gave a heavy sigh.

“One can’t escape from it—that talk I mean. I hear it in the club. I hear it in the House of Lords. It comes up inevitably sooner or later in every conversation over the coffee cups. How tragic that our minds should be obsessed with this fear three years after a terrible war!”

Abruptly he switched to another subject.

“I’m worried about Pam. Her marriage is not working out very well. I wish you could help her.”

Julia Bosanquet shook her head.

“How could I help?”

“By sympathy and advice. Pam is very fond of you.”

He glanced at his wrist-watch and rose from the garden chair.

“I must go. I have a man coming to see me.”

“Let him wait a bit,” said Julia Bosanquet. “It’s nice sitting here in the sun and you’ve taken the fright out of my mind.”

But Lord Bramley was a stickler for keeping appointments and took his leave of her reluctantly. Nothing would have pleased him more than to sit in the sun by the side of this pretty woman who had been good enough to give him her friendship and forget the difference of age.

At dinner that evening there was an empty chair and it was Pamela who called attention to the absence of Robin Melville.

“Isn’t Robin coming down to dinner?”

Lady Bramley answered.

“It’s unlike him to be unpunctual. I’ll give him full marks for that. Sound the gong again, Meggs.”

Old Meggs went out into the hall and banged the deep-toned gong again, but without immediate result.

“Were you interested in the old house?” asked Lady Bramley, speaking to Julian. “I’m glad Pamela took you there. It’s worth seeing if one doesn’t get too bored with the faded moths who live in it, poor dears.”

“I must say I was vastly interested,” said Julian. “I expected to see a ghost at any moment.”

“Oh lord, yes,” said Lady Bramley. “It reeks with ghosts. One of ’em walks down the long gallery and disappears through the panelled wall. A

young woman in an Elizabethan dress, they say."

Julian laughed and admitted his utter disbelief in all ghosts in spite of his previous remark.

"It's just the superstition of primitive minds," he said. "No intelligent person could possibly believe in them."

"A very sweeping remark, young man!" answered Lady Bramley good-naturedly. "I've never seen a ghost myself, and I can't say I want to, but several intelligent friends of mine have told me stories which I find difficult to disbelieve. What do you think, Frank?"

"Perhaps some minds can tune in to the vibrations of the past," said her husband. "If they get on to the same wavelength...."

He smiled and checked himself.

"I'm talking nonsense again. I don't know a darn' thing about vibrations. Who does? Pass me that mustard, Pamela, my dear. This sausage meat is revolting."

"The best I can do for you," said Lady Bramley. "Unless you get this Labour Government out we shall die of ptomaine poisoning or ulcerated stomachs."

She turned to Julian again with a laugh.

"I forgot for the moment that your father is one of the pillars of the Labour Party."

"Don't spare my feelings, ma'am," answered Julian, with one of his enchanting smiles. "But it's the Minister of Food you ought to blame—all this bulk buying!"

He launched into a monologue on the subject of bulk buying. He was enjoying himself. He felt more at ease at this table. He was getting on very nicely with his mother-in-law. If only Pam would be less sulky, he thought. Well, this afternoon he had coaxed a few smiles from her. She had even responded to his good humour. Pam was all right, apart from her disapproval of living on tick and a certain amount of camouflage. He was still very fond of her.

Nigel, who had been talking to his father, looked across at Henriette, who had been sitting silently at the table with downcast eyes.

"What's happened to Robin?" he asked. "Has anybody seen him lately?"

"Perhaps the lad is unwell," said Lord Bramley. "Or perhaps he shirks this

sausage meat—and I don't blame him—though I suppose we ought to thank God for it, remembering starving people in Europe."

"Henriette," said Lady Bramley, "go up to Mr. Melville's room and see if he's all right."

"Why should I go?" asked Henriette, with a sudden flush of anger. "I am not a *femme de chambre*."

"Don't be silly!" answered Lady Bramley. "And don't be rude."

Old Meggs came in again and whispered something to Lord Bramley, who looked startled and put down his table napkin.

"What's that?" asked Lady Bramley. "What's Meggs whispering about?"

"Birch wants to see me," said her husband. "Excuse me a moment."

Birch was the gardener doing his best to cope with gardens which had once had four gardeners.

"What does the man want?" asked Lady Bramley, looking at old Meggs. "How impertinent to interrupt his lordship at dinner."

"It's urgent," said Lord Bramley. "I'll be back soon. Carry on with dinner."

He went out into the hall after shutting the dining-room door behind him. His sandy-haired gardener stood there respectfully.

"Beg pardon, my lord, but I thought it best to come up at once. It was an awful shock to me. I couldn't believe my eyes, and such a nice young gentleman!"

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Lord Bramley in a low voice. "It's very terrible. I'll come with you. Can you get another man to help us?"

"Dick Lobb is down there, my lord; I shouted to him when I saw him t'other side of the lake. 'E was doing a bit of fishing, though 'e didn't ought to as I've told 'im many a time."

"That's all right," said Lord Bramley. "Come on."

He led the way through the gardens past the line of blue cypresses and down the footpath across the meadows to the lake. It was the path which Henriette had taken on her way to the derelict summer-house.

"There 'e is," said Birch. "Just as I dragged 'im out, poor young gentleman."

On the muddy bank of the lake lay the body of Robin Melville, face

upwards, with open eyes staring at the evening sky, which was flushed with rose-coloured light above a bar of gold. Water was oozing out of his clothes and there was green slime on them.

Lord Bramley knelt down in the mud and felt for Melville’s pulse, and put a hand over the boy’s heart.

Then he rose and stood with bowed head for a moment while the two men watched him silently with grave faces.

“A bad business,” said Lord Bramley, raising his head. “Get a hurdle. You men must carry him up to the house.”

On their way to the house the two men laid down their burden for a moment’s rest, wiping the sweat off their foreheads. Suddenly there was a cry which startled them. It came from Henriette. She had come out of the house and was running towards the lake, where she had last seen Melville. Perhaps she was driven by the fear of what had happened. Perhaps she had guessed in a moment of tragic vision.

“*O mon dieu! Robin. Mon bien-aimé!*”

She stood for a second looking down at the body of her young lover. Then she flung herself down and kissed his dead face, until she was dragged up by Lord Bramley, who held her in his arms.

“Hush!” he said. “Hush! Don’t give way, my dear.”

He told the two men to go on while he held the sobbing girl in his arms, and tried to comfort her but could not.

The body of Robin Melville was carried into the billiard-room and laid on a camp bed by the side of the table. Henriette had been taken up to her room by Pamela, to whom her father had whispered the tragic news.

It was Pamela who told Nigel. He was in his work-room sitting at a deal table with his head bent over a big book. He looked up when Pamela came in and smiled at her.

“Come in, Pam. I’m reading Yogi stuff. Vastly interesting.”

“Nigel,” said Pam, “something terrible has happened.”

The smile left his eyes, and he spoke two names in a questioning way.

“Henriette? Robin?”

“Robin,” said Pamela. “He’s drowned himself. He’s dead.”

Nigel stared at her and then spoke in a low voice filled with pity.

“Poor fellow! Poor old Robin! I was afraid of that. What a damn’ shame. Does Henriette know?”

Pamela nodded.

“She met him when they carried him back from the lake. She’s in her room weeping her heart out.”

Nigel was silent for quite a while.

“She killed him,” he said, after that silence.

Pamela gave a kind of gasp.

“Nigel!” she exclaimed, in a horror-stricken voice. “That’s a terrible thing to say.”

“I wouldn’t say it to anybody but you,” he answered. “But that’s the truth, Pam. She drove him into that lake as surely as though she had shoved him in.”

“Oh, Nigel!” exclaimed Pamela again.

Her brother looked into her eyes and his own were sombre and yet pitiful.

“I warned her,” he said. “I pleaded with her to leave him alone. She tempted him from the beginning and he was not a fellow who could yield to temptation lightly. She made love to him from the first and of course he fell for her and hated himself for doing so, because he wanted to play a decent game and was a friend of mine. You can see the torture he suffered. That kind of love affair was against his code and conscience to which he wanted to conform. He was no Don Juan. He was a sensitive plant and a bit of a poet. He believed in the ten commandments. He was afraid of sin. He was afraid of treachery to a friend. That’s why he walked into the lake. Henriette’s passion drove him there as the one way of escape. I saw it coming. I asked Father to give him the sack to get him away from here, but I was too late.”

Pamela listened to all this with silent emotion. Down there in the billiard-room was the body of a young man with whom she had been talking only a few hours before. He had smiled at some jest of hers. Now his eyes were glazed and his sensitive face was grey with the colour of death as she had seen him on the long, low bed by the billiard-table when she had brought down a sheet to cover him.

“Mind you,” said Nigel presently, “I’m not without pity for Henriette. Good lord, I’m not without the bowels of compassion. In a way I’m to blame.”

“You?” asked Pamela, incredulously. “Nigel, what are you saying now?”

“One has to get down to the ultimate truth,” he answered. “When I say I’m

to blame I mean that my crippled condition was the first cause of this tragedy. I've been no husband to a girl like Henriette. When I was brought home I could see the horror in her eyes—horror stronger than pity. She had lost her good-looking boy of the R.A.F. She was tied for ever to a cripple on two sticks. And I was not much company anyhow. I sat up here fighting pain. The infernal click-clack of that weaving machine got on her nerves. She wanted the joy of life and this was denied her. Then Robin came, romantic-looking, poetical, young and vital. What happened was inevitable, looking at Henriette's Latin blood and Robin's weakness, and the loneliness of both of them. Oh, I see all that. I've always seen it since first I became aware of danger. They gave themselves away. They couldn't hide it from me."

Pamela had wet eyes and she didn't weep easily.

"Nigel," she said presently, "couldn't this have been avoided? Why didn't you speak to Father earlier? Wasn't there some other way of escape for them before this happened?"

"One other way," he answered. "They might have gone off together. I wouldn't have stood in the way of their happiness if happiness would have been the end of the story. But it wouldn't have been. It would have been frightful unhappiness for both of them. Robin would have been conscience-stricken, haunted by his sense of guilt, and Henriette, who has no conscience, would have been wretched because of his misery. Besides, Robin hadn't a bean beyond his salary from Father. How would they have lived?"

He had thought it all out. He had seen it all happening and he spoke in a perfectly detached way as though his own happiness had no place in the argument.

"I had better go to Henriette," he said presently. "She must be suffering like hell."

He picked up his sticks and made his way to the bedroom where Henriette was alone with her grief. He found her sobbing on the bed with her face buried in a pillow wet with her tears.

"My dear," said Nigel. "I'm terribly sorry."

She did not answer and Nigel stooped over the bed letting his sticks fall to the floor. He put his arms round his wife and laid his face against her cheek.

"Poor darling!" he said.

"Oh, Nigel!" cried Henriette. "*Mon pauvre petit Robin! Mon bien-aimé! C'est effroyable!*"

“Yes,” said Nigel. “I know.”

“It was my fault!” cried Henriette, speaking in French again. “He was afraid of our love. It was I who tempted him.”

“Yes,” said Nigel. “But you were both caught in a trap like two birds. It was my fault partly. I left you too much alone. I was no companion for you. You had the *cafard*. When one has the *cafard* any old temptation is hard to resist.”

“Robin is dead!” she cried in a voice of anguish. “Robin is dead! What shall I do? I have lost my love!”

She wept convulsively again, and Nigel could do nothing to comfort her though he kept talking soothingly with one arm round her body and his face pressed tight against her wet cheek. She had betrayed him but there was nothing in his heart except pity and the ghost of his love for her when, for a short time before his smash, they had been very happy.

CHAPTER XXXV

Julian had returned to town in a cheerful mood in spite of the tragedy which had come at the week-end. Perhaps this visit to his wife's family had relieved his inferiority complex. He had been accepted as one of them. He had broken down the hostility of his formidable mother-in-law. She fed out of his hand, as he had told Pamela. The Old Man had been very civil to him. He had held his own, he thought, in conversation and social charm.

This sense of self-satisfaction sweetened him to Pam. She was aware of this change in him, of this renewed tenderness with a touch of his old magic. How could she resist it? How could she go on being cross with him when he made love to her again, and, even more disarming, made her laugh because of his gaiety and light-heartedness? And yet nothing had really changed except his mood and manner. He was still running up bills and evading payment. He was still consorting with a shady crowd of friends, shifty-eyed men and loud, vulgar women to whom she had to be civil for his sake. He was still dabbling on the Black Market as now he openly admitted to her, though he never told her any details of these transactions.

He had become a devotee of bridge and in a way that was a relief to Pamela as it liberated her from the boredom and vulgarity of night clubs and cabarets with his detestable set. They played bridge now four or five evenings a week, either with other people between Kensington and Hampstead or in their own little flat. Pamela enjoyed a good game with skilled players as these mostly were but she noticed, as once she had pointed out to Julian, making him angry, that they nearly always won. All those conventions he taught her didn't seem fair. They couldn't be fair if the result was always to walk away with other people's money, nine times out of ten. Where was the luck of the cards? This game played by husband and wife was too heavily weighted in their favour. It wasn't a game. It was a money-earning system. Between them they won as much as a pound or thirty shillings a night at half a crown a hundred.

"And very useful too," said Julian with a laugh when she protested against these gains. "Time well spent, Pam. What's your trouble?"

"Isn't it bare-faced robbery?" she asked. "Isn't it illegitimate, to say the least of it?"

"Perfectly legitimate," he answered. "We play with old hands at the game.

They have their own conventions. We happen to be a little more skilful, that's all. Also, as I admit, the luck of the cards always turns my way. That was marvellous the other night when I called and won a Grand Slam, doubled by that fool Cartwright. Doubled, by gum! It cost him a pretty penny."

"I don't believe he could afford it," said Pamela. "He went quite white and Mrs. Cartwright was on the verge of tears."

"Nonsense!" laughed Julian. "He's doing quite well for himself as Public Relations Officer for one of our Government departments. Besides, he shouldn't play bridge if he can't afford it."

"We can't afford it," said Pamela. "If we didn't win we should be in a bad way. You're a born gambler, Julian. It's sheer humbug for you to talk about affording it. Supposing the luck of the cards turned against you?"

"It won't," he answered, with smiling confidence. "Dame Fortune and I are on the best of terms. She won't let me down."

It was Pamela who let him down one evening and he was furious with her.

He had invited a young married couple to play with them.

"You'll like them," he told her. "They're out of the top drawer—the Hon. John Adam, son of Lord Waverley. He married Lettice, daughter of General Hinkson."

"Where did you pick them up?" asked Pamela.

His fair long eyelashes blinked for a moment and his mouth hardened.

"I don't quite like that phrase 'pick them up'. Can't I make my own friends?"

"I've never heard of them before," answered Pamela, "and I think you ought to let me know them before you invite them round here."

"Poppycock!" exclaimed Julian impatiently. "That kind of etiquette belongs to Jane Austen's time."

His momentary ill humour evaporated and he busied himself arranging the liquid refreshment for the evening on the small sideboard in the sitting-room.

"They'll have to do with gin and lime and the dregs of a bottle of whiskey. I suppose you'll have some coffee for them, Pam?"

Presently he spoke again about his expected guests.

"They're both good-lookers. And, by the way, I hope you'll put on one of your prettiest frocks. I like the blue silk one. You know, the one with a puffed

skirt.”

It was not long ago when Pamela would have responded happily to this interest in her frocks, but tonight it did not give her any thrill of joy, though she made some answer with a laugh. She felt desperately uneasy about everything, even so trivial a thing as the last drop in a whiskey bottle. Was it trivial? Had they a right to give their guests any alcoholic refreshment? The new taxes made it fabulous in cost. But Julian dispensed it with a liberal hand as though he had all the wealth of the Indies when, as she knew, by little bills pushed through the letter-box morning after morning, he was deeply in debt for almost everything. She suspected him of betting on horses and he turned first to the racing news in the evening papers. He was also interested in football pools and spent a lot of time on them. It was like living on the edge of a precipice. Yet in his good moods he was still lovable like a spoilt boy. He still had some enchantment.

The two people who arrived that evening—John Adam and his wife Lettice—were pleasant enough. A smart young couple, and, as Julian said, good-lookers. Young Adam had been in the Irish Guards during the War. Now he was in his father’s business—something to do with export trade—and found it hard to be at a desk all day. It was like being a caged animal, he said, and he felt suffocated for lack of fresh air and exercise.

“Where did you meet Julian?” asked Pamela. “Is he an old friend of yours—in time of war, I mean?”

The young man laughed and looked over at Julian who was getting busy with the gin and lime.

“Nothing like that! Unless one is an old friend after three encounters at a snack bar in the city, and a bridge party in Langley’s flat. You know Langley, I believe.”

“A very attractive man!” said Lettice brightly. “He seems a throw-back to that almost extinct species, once known as a man of the world.”

“He plays a jolly good game of bridge,” said young Adam.

“Yes, I was his partner,” said Lettice, “and won quite a packet. Such fun! I’m becoming a regular bridge fiend.”

Julian was in his most charming mood and it was obvious that Lettice Adam found him rather disturbing. It made her blushful when he smiled at her, and she laughed in a simpering way at his small jokes over the bridge table.

Before the game began young Adam asked whether they should cut for

partners.

“Excellent idea,” agreed Julian, “but Pamela and I generally play together against all comers.”

He spread out the cards with one flick and he and Pamela drew the highest. Afterwards she wondered how he had arranged this. Had he willed her to choose the card nearest to her?

“Husband and wife against husband and wife,” said Julian. “A very dangerous combination. I expect you have your own conventions.”

Lettice Adam laughed and blushed again.

“John and I just play the forcing two and the one no-trump. We’re not clever enough to go beyond that, are we, John?”

“Oh, I don’t take it very seriously,” answered her husband.

“Half a crown a hundred?” asked Julian.

Young Adam raised his eyebrows and smiled.

“A bit high, isn’t it? Still, I don’t suppose it will break us.”

“You’ll probably win,” said Julian, “I’ve been having poor hands lately.”

But young Adam and his wife lost the first rubber which was quick, and then the second which took a bit longer.

“Gosh!” exclaimed Adam when the figures were added up. “I’m being dragged down to ruin.”

He smiled at Pamela who was looking serious.

“An expensive evening,” he told her. “I’ll have to pawn a cigarette-case or some other bauble.”

“Sorry!” said Pamela. “I’m afraid we’re robbing you.”

“Oh, you’ll get it back,” said Julian. “At this time in the evening the luck always turns. I’ve noticed it a hundred times.”

But the luck didn’t turn. Julian continued to have good cards and always knew exactly what was in Pamela’s hand. She underbid deliberately, to his annoyance, and did not answer his call which should have led to three no-trumps and another game. He caught her eyes and as though absent-mindedly, but as she saw with a plain signal to her, he tapped his cheek with his forefinger three times.

Suddenly Pamela saw red. She flung her cards on to the table and cried out:

“Julian, you’re cheating! It’s disgusting.”

There was a moment or two of silence. Young Adam and his wife looked at each other in consternation. Lettice became very white.

“Have you gone mad, Pam?” asked Julian, his fair skin flushing angrily.

“It’s sheer robbery,” answered Pamela. “We invite people here and then steal their money. I’ll never play again—never with you, Julian.”

Young John Adam looked distressed. Like most Englishmen he hated anything in the nature of a ‘scene’ and this accusation against his host by Julian’s pretty wife was, he thought, frightful. He tried to pour oil on the troubled waters.

“I say, my dear Mrs. Inchbold, I’m really shocked at you! I’m sure it’s been a perfectly straight game. Lettice and I don’t mind losing a bit.”

“Julian cheats,” said Pamela, in a low voice. “He’s been cheating all the evening. What he calls his conventions are just a secret code between husband and wife. I won’t stand for it any longer.”

She sprang up from the table, burst into tears and left the room.

“Pam isn’t feeling well,” said Julian. “I hope you’ll excuse her. All this nonsense about cheating is just a bee in her bonnet. We play the ordinary conventions, of course. I hope you won’t pay any attention to what she said in a moment of hysteria.”

“Not in the least,” said John Adam politely. And yet now that this man’s wife had accused him there was an ugly doubt in his mind. Once or twice during the game he had been surprised by Inchbold’s extraordinary knowledge of what cards his wife had held. He seemed to read through the backs of her cards. One couldn’t do that with the ordinary conventions. Still, he brushed that thought away. It was a very ugly thought.

“We had better go,” said Lettice. “I’m so terribly sorry, Mr. Inchbold.”

“Let’s settle up,” said her young husband. “How much do we owe you, Inchbold?”

Inchbold laughed good-naturedly.

“Oh, that’s all right. In view of the charge against me we had better make it a washout.”

“Good lord, no!” said Adam.

It was a matter of four pounds odd, which Adam put down on the card

table. Julian made no further protest about accepting it.

“Don’t go,” he said. “Have another gin-and-lime? Pamela will be back when she’s mopped her eyes.”

“Such a pity!” cried Lettice. “It was such an enjoyable evening. But we ought to go now.” She was held for a moment by Julian’s smiling eyes and blushed very deeply in a schoolgirl way.

“Do give our love to your wife,” she said. “Do tell her that the game was perfectly above board.”

“Thanks,” said Julian. “I will.”

When they had gone he strode into the small bedroom where Pamela was sitting at her dressing-table. She saw his blue eyes looking into the mirror at her.

“Pam,” he said harshly, “why the devil did you make a scene like that?”

She answered quietly.

“You were cheating. You were tempting me to cheat.”

“Utterly untrue!” he protested. “Those conventions——”

She raised her voice and there was a note of passion in it.

“Don’t use that word again, Julian, or I shall have to scream. It’s a secret code and you signalled to me. We just robbed those two young people. I’ve finished with it.”

“It’s no use arguing with you,” he answered sullenly. “You’re as obstinate as a mule. You have the obstinacy of your caste, all so superior and arrogant. I’ve a damn’ good mind to go Communist.”

“You’d make a good Commissar,” she answered, with cold sarcasm.

He stared at her furiously, at her image in the mirror, then strode out of the room and went back to the sitting-room where she heard him pouring some more drink into a glass.

CHAPTER XXXVI

Kit Harington's booklet entitled *The Freedom Party* found its way with a thud into many waste-paper baskets. It lay there with appeals for waifs and strays, pamphlets on the way of salvation, leaflets on the Liberal International and the Communist menace. But many people must have read it and studied his argument, for his morning's mail was heavily increased and his time for breakfast was lengthened by the number of letters he had to open—sometimes, being a careless fellow, with a buttery knife.

On the whole they were favourable and many of his correspondents were eminent people whose names he had picked from *Who's Who*. There was a high percentage of bishops, canons and archdeacons—doubtless attracted by his call for a New Crusade in defence of Christendom and Christian civilization. A letter from the Bishop of Ashleigh was typical.

My dear Kit [he wrote, having met Harington many times at Longacre before the war], *I am much impressed by your proposal for a new Party in the Middle of the Road, combining the moderate-minded members of the three existing parties among whom there is much in common, at least in their staunch adherence to the ideals of liberty now threatened by the advance of Left Wing extremism and to a much less degree by Right Wing die-hardism. The coming conflict of humanity is now plain to see because the preliminary battles have already been fought. It is a life and death struggle between two hostile forces. On the one hand are those who wish to force man into a new pattern of life called by different names: State Socialism, Communism, Fascism—but all meaning the enslavement of the individual by denying freedom of thought or freedom of action. On the other side, far less powerful at the moment, are those who believe that the individual mind or soul has a divine right superior to that of any State or System which denies freedom of faith and the pursuit of truth, beauty and goodness according to the Greek ideal and the teaching of Christ. There is nothing new in this conflict. It is as old as man himself. It is, of course, the eternal conflict between Good and Evil, between tyranny and liberty. Totalitarianism is only another name for the tribal system under a ruthless chief. Civilization is the break-down of this tyranny, liberating man's spirit and giving free play to his infinite variety of imagination and intelligence in the pursuit of beauty and knowledge. Now that*

is threatened, as never before perhaps since the advance of Genghis Khan and his hordes, by the conquest of Communism into the very heart of Europe. Unless, as you say in your admirable essay, we recognize the imminence and the gravity of this menace and resist it—not passively but by an active Crusade of freedom-loving minds—we shall be lost. We shall lose everything that makes for the civilized mind. The value of an active resistance has been proved by Italy which, thank God, has won a fine victory against the enemy within its gates. Like the Trojan horse the enemy is within our own gates, not in great numbers yet but creeping into high places stealthily—as high at least as the House of Commons, as we have seen by recent events and speeches revealing an open rebellion against moderate Labour.

There is a strange and sinister lure in this doctrine of Marxist Communism. I am baffled by it. I can understand the lure of the ideal of Christian Communism sharing all things in common, though in our complicated modern world, with its vast populations and industrial life, it is an impracticable form of society. I can understand also that it offers the chance of power and domination to ambitious and ruthless men. But I cannot understand its appeal to some of the younger intellectuals and still less to the rank and file of factory workers. Are they completely ignorant of what happens behind the Iron Curtain? Have they heard nothing about the Cheka, now called the N.K.V.D.? Have they not been told about the eleven to fifteen million Russians in political concentration camps? Do they believe that there is any freedom of labour or any high standard of living for the masses in Soviet Russia?

I am with you heart and soul in this plan for a New Crusade and for a new party of Freedom. There is only one man who could lead it and carry it through. That is my old friend Bramley, the soul of integrity sans peur et sans reproche, *fair-minded and courageous. Try to persuade him to unfurl the banner.*

Kit Harington read this letter at breakfast over a boiled egg which he had cooked himself and with a ginger-coloured kitten curling round his left leg and purring loudly.

“A very sensible old bird, Ginger,” said Harington, addressing the small creature at his feet. Like all men who live alone he had the habit of talking aloud.

Many of his correspondents were less interested in the spiritual and moral side of his argument than in the deplorable state of the nation’s economic position, which they thought was so alarming that only a coalition or a new

Middle Party could avert disaster.

There was a letter from Victor Garstein, the economist.

My dear Harington [he wrote], *you are perfectly right! The present crowd in power are quite hopeless. They are spendthrifts and gamblers at a time when we are a bankrupt nation living largely on tick. They started a variety of costly schemes after a world war which had exhausted all our reserves of wealth and impoverished half the world. They spoke only in millions and hundreds of millions, on national health, education, food subsidies, and all manner of social services. Their capital expenditure requires a vast tribute of taxation from the nation, staggering in its burden to the professional classes and those who are still living on their capital reserves. They are killing the goose which lays the golden eggs by income tax, death duties, and now a capital levy, while they take it out of the rank and file by indirect taxation on baccy, beer and their so-called luxuries. What's going to happen when the goose lies dead? What's going to happen when our sellers' market closes down? There are signs of it already because of our high prices due to inflated wages. Where then will be Stafford Cripps and his export drive and his Calvinistic austerities? These people in power have created an enormous bureaucracy with millions of unproductive officials whose only effect on national life is to slow down enterprise, enforce petty controls and strangle trade by rules and regulations. The cost of this bureaucracy with a multitude of highly paid posts for those on top—dear old Alf and dear old Bert—runs into something like 250 millions a year, in addition to all the other hundreds of millions.*

When is the crash coming? It's coming all right! I give it a year at most. American aid—our national dole—is not enough to postpone it further than that. It will be a pretty sickening crash when it comes, resulting in mass unemployment, undernourishment, and, in my opinion, political upheaval. It will make us weak in international affairs when unless we are strong we shall see Western Europe slipping behind the Iron Curtain.

There is no realization in the minds of the people of this grim and inevitable calamity. The worst of it is that the Conservatives are unlikely to get a working majority in the next general election. The mass of the voters will vote Labour again if the only alternative is to put the Tories in. Therefore, my dear Harington, I believe with you, that the time is ripe for a new Party appealing to all moderate men and women sick of the old slogans and looking for some new leadership or some kind of coalition. It would really be a revival of the old Liberal tradition and it's a thousand pities that the Liberal Party is

moribund. I don't like your title of "A New Crusade". That sounds sloppy, but then I'm a cynic. Nor do I care much for your Freedom Party. But at the moment I can't suggest anything better. Anyhow I agree with your general ideas and argument. More power to your elbow.

Among his friends in the House of Commons Harington found a good deal of hostility, some ridicule, and a small amount of agreement.

"What you're setting out to do, Harington," said his friend, Jaggers, "is to ask the Conservative Party to commit suicide. Why should we? We shall gain an overwhelming majority in the next election."

"Don't you believe it," said Harington. "The Conservative Party, as it now exists, will never get into power again. It belongs to the past. We need a New Look in the land, not the old moth-eaten cloak of Tory reaction."

"You're a renegade," said Jaggers. "You've ratted. I always thought you'd come to a bad end. That red hair of yours..."

Several Labour members spoke to him about his manifesto, some of them resentfully, others with academic agreement.

Childers Marsh, very much on the Left Wing and not concealing even that he was one of the 'fellow travellers' on the road to Moscow, came over to him in the smoking-room one day and tried to get up an argument.

"I've been reading that little book of yours, Harington. It made me laugh quite a lot."

"I didn't know you had a sense of humour," answered Harington. "Isn't a sense of humour taboo in Moscow?"

"It's enough to make a cat laugh," said Childers Marsh. "The idea of a New Crusade belongs to the Plantagenet period. All you people who are in a blue funk about Communism belong to the Plantagenet period. You're like the old woman who tried to sweep back the sea with a broken broom. Communism, in various forms—I admit that it will take different forms according to the psychology of different peoples—is irresistible. It is forced upon the world, including this country, by economic necessity as well as by intelligent conviction. Christianity is a dead faith. Communism is the new and living faith. You can't fight it by guns nor by atom bombs, nor even by Sunday afternoons at home by the Oxford Group movement."

"Go back to your fellow traitors," said Harington very rudely. "I don't want to talk to you. I don't like your company."

Childers Marsh laughed unpleasantly.

“When England becomes a Soviet,” he said, “quite a lot of people will have to be liquidated. Their names are already written in the book.”

He sloped off to his own group of extreme Left Wingers, who glanced towards Harington and then laughed.

Stephen Inchbold had a few words with him in the public lobby where he had been talking to a group of his constituents.

“I read your book, Harington,” he said with a friendly smile.

“It didn’t bore you, I hope,” answered Harington modestly.

“Not at all! I found myself in agreement with some parts of it such as the gravity of our economic position, not yet realized by the rank and file. Then I’m not hostile to a party truce when it comes to international affairs and the defence of liberty in Europe.”

Harington smiled at him and raised his red eyebrows.

“Do you go as far as that? Well, may I enrol you as a supporter of the new Freedom Party?”

“You may not!” answered Stephen Inchbold, with a short laugh. “The Labour Party stands for freedom without any need of conversion. The Trade Unions show a vast majority hostile to Communism. The old liberties are safe in our hands, young fellow!”

“I can’t agree with that,” said Harington. “Socialism leads inevitably to the negation of liberty. Already there are frightful encroachments upon personal liberty under a bureaucratic tyranny of jacks-in-office. I quite admit that the P.M. and others are moderate-minded and liberal-minded men, but the party machine and the pressure of the Left Wing——”

Stephen Inchbold struck him a sham blow on the shoulder.

“We must agree to differ on those points. All the same I liked your book here and there—like the curate’s egg. Excuse me, won’t you? Here are some more of my home-town friends.”

He moved away to a group of men in cloth caps who were being shepherded by one of the policemen in the lobby.

There was one letter about his book which he put in his wallet. It was not from a bishop or a Member of Parliament. It was from Pamela—just a short note:

Dearest Kit,

I have read your book and was thrilled by it. You have put out a fine idea—a noble one, I think, and fine ideas don't die even if they fail.

Yours ever,
Pam.

She did not tell him that she was very unhappy and that her own crisis in life was near at hand.

CHAPTER XXXVII

Christopher Harington dined one evening at the ‘Samovar’ with three distinguished guests. They were Pamela, her father, and a young man named Berkely, who had been President of the Oxford Union before getting a place in the Treasury where he was too hard worked to write those humorous lyrics—he kept more serious verse in his private and secret archives—which had been published in the *Isis*.

Harington had discovered on his last visit to Pamela that Julian was going up to Manchester on some mysterious mission of a business character and that her father would be in town for a night or two during the debate on the Budget. It seemed to him an excellent opportunity for a little dinner-party and he had sung the praises of the ‘Samovar’ for its good food and pleasant atmosphere. His invitation had been accepted and his Russian friend, the *patron*, had promised to provide a special dinner so far as the era of austerity permitted.

“I want some daffodils on the table,” said Harington, thinking of Pamela’s love for that flower.

“Natalia will buy them,” said the Russian.

Daffodils were on the table in a tall glass vase when Harington arrived a quarter of an hour before the appointed time. The little restaurant looked bright and cheerful. Every table had a clean cloth of red-and-white check. There were daffodils on the other tables.

“If that little Chink comes tonight,” said Harington, “thrust him into the outer darkness. He’s always listening and giggling.”

The *patron* laughed loudly.

“The little man is quite harmless,” he declared. “He is full of wisdom from Confucius and the Chinese philosophers. He is attached to the Chinese Embassy in London. But I shall not have many clients tonight. It is Friday and the students have spent their week’s money and economize in tea-shops.”

Berkely arrived first. He was a good-looking young man who still seemed in the undergraduate stage of growth, intellectually.

“Nice little hide-away!” he remarked after a swift smiling glance round the restaurant. “A pleasant rendezvous for a pretty woman. I’ll ask Jill to come one

night.”

“Now don’t go crowding this place with your pretty sluts,” said Harington. “It’s my sanctuary. Have a gin-and-lime?”

“Why not vodka?” asked Berkely. “Isn’t it more appropriate to this environment, and that dark-haired lass behind the counter? She’s Russian to the tips of her ears.”

“Keep your eyes off her,” said Harington. “She’s a respectable young woman and I’m her guardian angel.”

Berkely gave him a glinting smile.

“You red-headed old devil! You’d lure any poor female to destruction.”

“Now look here, Berkely,” said Harington severely. “None of your loose talk in front of my guests.”

“Who are they?” asked Berkely carelessly. “Not the Archbishop of Canterbury, I hope. Not any Labour Members of Parliament, I trust. No crypto-Communist making a private list of those to be liquidated when his pals take over power?”

He was rather impressed when he learnt that Lord Bramley and his daughter were coming.

“Old Bramley? A noble soul in a wicked world. What’s his daughter like? Comely or grim with intellectual arrogance? Save me from intellectual females.”

“You’ll like her,” said Harington.

“Cripes! I remember now,” said Berkely. “She married the son of a Labour man, didn’t she? The papers were full of it. ‘Peer’s daughter marries Labour member’s son.’ What could be more horrible? What could be more scandalous and hurtful to the social austerity of the Labour Party?”

“Shut up!” said Harington. “Here they come.”

Pamela greeted Harington and glanced round the restaurant with a smile. “This might be in Paris,” she said. “How did you find it, Kit?”

“This is the kind of place I like,” said Lord Bramley, who had dined with Kings and taken refreshment in the palaces of Maharajahs and lived in a great house for a time as Governor General of a British Dominion, before the abandonment of Empire.

Pamela’s quick eyes had noticed the daffodils.

“Precious beauties,” she exclaimed. “I believe you must have put them there, Kit, knowing how much I love them.”

“The *patron* is a man of taste. Gin-and-lime, Pam? What will you have, sir? Sherry?”

“Thanks,” said Lord Bramley, “if it won’t drag you down to ruin.”

“It’s my night out,” said Harington, “I’ve been saving up for this.”

Berkely, who had been introduced to Pamela, grinned at her.

“That’s how Members of Parliament talk,” he said. “They defraud the public of a thousand a year and then plead penury.”

It was a pleasant little dinner. It would have been pleasanter for Kit Harington if he had not been aware that Pamela was forcing herself to appear bright and cheerful. She looked worried and worn. Her eyes were sad as he saw when he looked into them. Several times she sat quite silent while Berkely was talking with her father about the coming Budget and the postponement of national bankruptcy by American aid.

Under cover of this conversation Harington spoke across the table to Pamela.

“Feeling chippy tonight? Worried?”

“A slight headache,” she admitted. “I’m all right.”

“I wish I could believe you were,” he answered.

“Hush!” said Pamela, with a pleading look.

She did not tell him the cause of her particular worry that evening. Julian had gone off to Manchester in an ugly mood, annoyed by her questions as to the reason for his journey.

“Business,” he had answered curtly.

“What business, Julian? Tell me. Haven’t I the right to know?”

“I hate cross-examination,” he told her. “You’re always quizzing me. Isn’t it enough when I tell you that I’m going to Manchester on business? Damn it, I don’t go there for pleasure!”

“The tradesmen are pressing for money,” she told him, not continuing that argument.

“Tell them to go to hell,” he answered irritably. “They’ll be paid in due course.”

“Did you write a cheque for the stores?” she asked. “That’s the chief thing.”

“They’ve had a cheque all right,” he answered, and then asked her to iron a pair of his trousers.

He had not been gone more than an hour when there was a ring at the bell. She thought it might be Kit, but when she opened the door she saw a little man whose face seemed dimly familiar to her.

“Pardon me,” he said politely, “I am Mr. Manley, manager of the Universal Stores. May I have a word with your husband, if he happens to be at home?”

Pamela had a sense of impending trouble. Why did the manager of the stores want to see Julian? She knew they had been pressing for a settlement of their account for many weeks past. She had been humiliated by a kind of hesitation on the part of the assistants when she had given a new order. But Julian had sent them a cheque, he said.

“I’m sorry,” said Pamela, “but my husband has just gone to Manchester.”

Mr. Manley looked disappointed, but not surprised.

“Oh, that’s a pity. In that case perhaps I might have a few private words with yourself, madam.”

“Certainly,” said Pamela. “Come in.”

She took the little man into the sitting-room and offered him a chair. He sat on the edge of it and spoke nervously.

“Excuse me, but I thought it best to call on you. You see, as manager of the Stores I’m held responsible for the accounts. I am not allowed to let them run for more than three months at the very longest. As you know, cash or weekly payments is the rule. In your case the bills have remained unpaid for many months.”

“My husband has sent you a cheque to settle the account,” said Pamela. “He told me so just before going to Manchester an hour ago.”

Mr. Manley of the Universal Stores looked distressed.

“A cheque did arrive,” he admitted, “but it was not honoured by the bank. It is what is vulgarly called—if you will allow me to mention it—a dud cheque. My company takes a rather serious view of it. I am only manager, you understand.”

“There must be some mistake,” said Pamela, feeling herself become pale.

Mr. Manley twisted his felt hat nervously.

“Very possibly,” he said. “Very possibly. But I’m afraid we must take out a summons unless the money is paid into the bank without delay. Those are my instructions, madam. A dud cheque, as they call it, is very unpleasant.”

“Most unpleasant,” agreed Pamela, feeling rather faint.

“We don’t like to press our customers,” said the manager of the Universal Stores apologetically. “Times are hard for everyone. We fully realize that and we wish to make every allowance possible. But of course a cheque which isn’t honoured at the bank is most regrettable. If Mr. Inchbold could pay in the money before the banks close tomorrow a summons could be avoided. That really is what I came to say. We dislike having to take out a summons against our customers.”

Pamela thought very hard. She hid her deep distress from this polite little man.

“The money will be paid in tomorrow,” she said, “before the banks close.”

“That will be satisfactory to all concerned,” said the manager of the Universal Stores. “I hope you will forgive this intrusion, madam, most painful to me, I assure you.”

“Thanks for calling,” said Pamela. “My husband must have made a mistake, of course.”

“Exactly!” said Mr. Manley. “I rely entirely upon your assurance, madam. Before the banks close tomorrow.”

“Before the banks close. Good day, and thank you again.”

She felt sick when he had gone. Julian had let her down terribly. He must have known that his cheque would not be honoured at the bank. He wasn’t a fool in these things. Had he done it on purpose, forcing her to get money from her father? She would never forgive him if that were so. It was intolerable and unpardonable. It was the trick of a criminal mind. Had she married a criminal as well as a cad? She asked that question in her own heart.

She dressed hurriedly for Kit Harington’s dinner at the ‘Samovar’ and then took a bus to a point nearest to her father’s flat.

He was not surprised to see her.

“Good idea!” he said after kissing her. “We’ll go together to Harington’s chop-house. You’re looking a trifle pale, my dear. Not a chill, I hope?”

“A chill in my mind,” she answered. “Father, I hardly dare tell you. It’s too

humiliating. It’s too horrible.”

He looked at her gravely. For a moment he wondered whether the break had come with her husband. Had she fled from him, or had he deserted her?

“Tell me,” he said. “There’s nothing you can’t tell me, Pam.”

She told him the story about the dud cheque and her promise that it should be paid into Julian’s bank before closing time next day.

“Father, Julian is hopeless. He frightens me. He’s utterly careless of honour. He’s dishonest by instinct. He looks at life like a welsher on a racecourse.”

Lord Bramley sighed and raised both hands slightly.

“My poor darling,” he said tenderly. “Certainly there’s something wrong with him. It was a silly idea sending a dud cheque. Perhaps he hoped to put in a bit of money before it was collected—a gambler’s chance.”

“Father,” said Pamela in a low voice, “perhaps it was a way of blackmailing you. He has often urged me to get some more money out of you as though you were made of gold. He pressed me to come begging to you. He puts me into the mud of humiliation. He knows that he can get at you through me.”

For a moment or two her father sat at his desk where he had dropped into a chair, making little marks on his blotting-pad with a fountain-pen.

“I hardly think that,” he said presently. “That’s taking too harsh a view, Pam. I prefer to think that he has been careless and irresponsible. Anyhow there are no bones broken. Get this cheque into his bank before closing time tomorrow.”

“Oh, Father, thank you a thousand times,” cried Pamela. She fell on her knees and put an arm around him and laid her head against his body as he sat there at his desk.

“It’s not a big amount and you needn’t give a word of thanks, my dear,” he said, writing the necessary figures in his thin pointed script. “You and I stand together always. ‘O wert thou in the cauld blast I’d shelter thee!’ ”

He turned sideways and kissed her hair.

Then he looked at a clock on the mantelshelf.

“Time marches on! We mustn’t be late for Kit. Put this piece of paper in your handbag. Don’t let it blow away. We’ll take a taxi to Kit’s eating-house.”

On the way he held her hand and she leaned her head against his shoulder.

“Don’t let Kit see there’s anything the matter,” he said presently. “Pull yourself together, my dear. Put a brave face on things.”

“I’ll try, Father.”

She had come smiling into the ‘Samovar’. She had spoken the right words about the daffodils, but Kit’s keen eyes had seen the worry in hers. It was more than worry. It was the tragic hopelessness of a trapped creature.

The ‘Samovar’ was quiet that evening. The little Chinese gentleman appeared, bowed to Harington with his little tittering laugh, and took a seat at a table within hearing distance of Harington’s party. Lady Maggs came in with her Pekinese, smiled sweetly at Harington, and ate her solitary meal with tit-bits for her little beast. A few others propped up newspapers or books in front of their plates—solitary souls who had emerged from bed-sitting-rooms in the neighbourhood of Knightsbridge.

Towards the end of the meal the *patron* came to the table and spoke to Harington.

“It is not bad, the little dinner?”

Lord Bramley answered.

“Excellent. Quite a treat.”

Harington introduced the *patron* to his guests.

“One of the old régime. No friend of Joe Stalin and the Men in the Kremlin.”

It was Berkely who addressed an incautious question to the Russian—incautious as Harington knew, because it would lead to a monologue from the *patron*.

“Do you think they’re preparing for a new war, or is that all bluff?”

The Russian raised his hands.

“It is war already, and they’re winning it all along the line. It is not a shooting war as yet. It is what your newspapers call ‘a cold war’. For them it’s an easy game. They know the technique perfectly—infiltration of Communist ideology, a Fifth Column waiting for orders, political pressure strong enough to obtain the key posts in control of police and transport; then a *coup d’état* as in Czechoslovakia. Quite easy, you see! Very simple and effective! You will ask me two questions. One—what is the attraction of Communism for the minds of a dangerous minority? What is its magic spell which forms the first

cell and creates a spider's web of treachery within a nation? I will answer. I am one who knows. It is an appeal to those who are discontented with the conditions of life, and who are envious of those who seem to have better luck. It is an appeal to those who are instinctive haters—to whom hatred is a stimulant and a drug. There are many such, my friends. It appeals to those in poor situations, underpaid, underfed, bullied perhaps by their employers and feel within themselves the need of revenge against society. The victory of Communism would make them the masters and the bullies. They would be on top and those who oppressed them, or whom they think were their oppressors, would be in concentration camps or in the torture-chambers of a police state. In any case they would be purged and liquidated. There is another question you will ask. I expect it. Does the Soviet State think that war is inevitable with the pluto-democracies as they call us? I answer that question. Certainly! It is a dogma of their religion as laid down by Karl Marx and Lenin, and from time to time by Stalin. In their minds the victory over Germany was not followed by a peace or a prelude to peace but by a preparation for another war—the same war—which is for the domination of the world. They pause a little until they have perfected the atom bomb. They will even retreat here and there if threatened by their enemies at any point—*réculer pour mieux sauter*. That is their technique. It is all worked out. They will gain what they can by strategy. As I say, they are gaining all along the line. There are Fifth Columns in France, in Italy, in the Russian zone of Germany. Finland will be enslaved, though at the moment they hesitate and try to resist. After that, Sweden. They establish very good bases for the inevitable conflict of the final Armageddon. I speak what I know."

A girl interrupted him with a shrill laugh. It was his daughter Natalia who came to hold his arm.

"You talk too much, Father. You are one of the world's talkers."

"That's true," admitted her father with a loud laugh. "I apologize. Pardon me, *madame et messieurs*! I talk off a donkey's hind leg. It is the Russian vice. I make you a thousand excuses."

He bowed, laughed again, and retired to his place behind the counter.

Harington spoke in lowered tones, smiling at Pamela.

"Don't believe everything the old man says. He doesn't know any more than you or I."

"It's frightening all the same," said Pamela. "It gives me the shivers. What do you think, Father?"

Lord Bramley gave a little groan.

"I'm afraid what he says is the truth. I wish I could disagree with him. Who can do so now, after Czechoslovakia?"

"It gives me a pain at the pit of the stomach," said young Berkely. "I don't want to be atomized. I don't want to see Canterbury Cathedral in dust and ashes. I don't want to end my life hiding in a cave in the Welsh mountains. I want to be Prime Minister of a happy and prosperous England and die abed at a ripe old age surrounded by my children and my children's children."

He spoke with a smile but there was some sincerity in his words.

Harington thrust his fingers through his red hair.

"Confound that White Russian!" he said half angrily. "He has taken the taste out of his own food. I was a fool to introduce him. Well do I know that he's a prophet of woe. Personally I haven't given up hope of peace. If Western Europe and the United States keep strong and united Russia won't risk the consequences—which are death."

"I agree," said Lord Bramley. "That's our best hope. We must all work for that."

Berkely made an appeal to Harington.

"What about a brandy, old man? I need it to give me some Dutch courage. Every time people talk about Russia and a coming war I feel most depressed. So it is, I find, with my contemporaries. They're all taking to drink or running off with each other's wives, or lapsing into tragic verse without rhyme or reason. It's a very terrible world. The amount of bad verse which is being written by despairing souls is really deplorable and a sign of the times."

He caught Pamela's eyes fixed upon his and smiled at her.

"Seriously," said Lord Bramley, "is there a shadow over the minds of young people because of this threat of war? I'm out of touch with them now."

Berkely answered seriously.

"Very much so, sir. Some of them are tempted to go Communist as the one way of avoiding war. They would rather adopt the Russian system than see England a graveyard of rotting corpses and atomized lunatics."

"Are you among them in thinking that?" asked Lord Bramley with a straight look.

Berkely hesitated.

“I confess I dally with the idea sometimes. I’m not one of the little heroes. I dislike the idea of atom bombs, not only for my own sake but for the sake of pretty girls I know, and young creatures, and the old inheritance of English beauty, and a thatched cottage I have with tulips in bed and chaffinches on the lawn behind the latticed windows, and an almond tree in blossom. I’m in favour of peace and life, not war and death of which we’ve had a bellyfull. If by going Communist one could save all that it might be worth while.”

“You wouldn’t save it,” said Lord Bramley. “The old inheritance of English beauty would wither and die under Soviet rule. They wouldn’t let you live with your almond tree, young fellow. You would be liquidated. They don’t like your type. And your mind would be in chains if not your body. Russian soldiers would show no mercy to those pretty girls you want to save. The little ones would be brought up with debauched minds, made into robots, incapable of knowing truth or seeing the light of reason. No, it would be best to die in defence of liberty; besides, we’re in honour bound to other nations. We can’t rat. If we have to go down let’s go down with our colours flying. Let’s die like gentlemen and not like dirty dogs. Don’t you agree?”

Berkely answered with a laugh.

“Fine old-fashioned stuff, sir.”

Pamela touched her father’s arm and spoke to him.

“Father, you’re giving Kit a bad time. This is a terrible conversation at a dinner-table!”

“One can’t get away from it,” said her father. “It’s the talk at every tea-table and in every club chair. But I’m ready to talk or listen about anything else. Suggest something, my dear.”

“Birds, flowers, the ballet, the New Look!” suggested Pamela with a smile. “Or shall we go call it a day and go to bed?”

“Good heavens, we haven’t had our coffee yet,” cried Harington. “Let’s talk about something really cheerful.”

“Is there something?” asked Pamela. She still felt humiliated, angry and sick because of what had happened before she reached the ‘Samovar’. Julian had behaved atrociously. She could never forgive him.

Harington looked at her and she saw the sympathy in his eyes and wanted to weep.

“The other day,” he said, “something very amusing happened in the smoking-room of the House of Commons. I must tell you.”

It was an amusing anecdote and reminded Lord Bramley of similar jests which took place in his time in the Lower House.

For an hour he held the table with stories of people he had met round about the world and in English country houses. Some of these stories were highly comical and some of them with a touch of historical interest. Berkely was enthralled by these reminiscences and forgot the despairing talk which had preceded them. Pamela had heard some of them before, but did not cramp her father's style by mentioning that. He was playing up to this young company and he was giving her a respite. 'Father is wonderful,' she thought. 'He's doing this for my sake. He has the kindest heart in the world and he tells his stories like an actor.'

It was an hour later when he checked himself.

"Good heavens, I've been talking too much. I've been boring you young people."

"Not for a second, sir," said Berkely. "I shall remember the thrilling things you've told us. I shan't forget your generosity in doing so."

"A pretty speech, my boy!" said Lord Bramley, putting a hand on Berkely's shoulder. "But, my dear fellow, this has been a pleasant evening. Pam, we must be going."

"I'll come with you," said Harington. "I'll see Pamela home, if I may."

"I'll put you into a taxi, then," said Lord Bramley. "I'll take a stroll to the Club. I haven't had time to read the evening papers."

"I'm going down Pall Mall," said young Berkely, "may I walk with you, sir?"

"By all means. Glad of your company."

Harington paid his bill. Pamela shook hands with the *patron*, and Natalia curtseyed to her as though she were a Grand Duchess.

The little Chinese gentleman had finished his dinner too and was waiting at the desk to pay his bill.

He spoke to Harington with a tittering laugh.

"Excuse me. I listen to your conversation. Velly interesting. But there is a Chinese saying which is velly good."

"Yes?" asked Harington, a trifle impatiently.

The little Chinese laughed again.

“ ‘If people would only speak about what they know there would be a great silence on earth.’ Excuse me! Good night.”

He tittered again, bowed, and made way for Harington to go out of the restaurant with Pamela and his friends.

In the taxi, Harington spoke to Pamela.

“What has happened?” he asked. “Can’t you tell me?”

“No,” she answered, “I can’t tell you, Kit.”

“Something serious?”

“Serious to me. Don’t ask.”

They were silent for some time. Then Harington spoke again.

“If ever you need any help from me—if there’s anything I could ever do for you——”

“I know,” said Pamela. “Thanks, Kit.”

She didn’t ask him up to her flat, nor did he suggest going up.

“Good night, Kit,” she said. “Thanks for the little dinner. I’m sorry I was a wet blanket.”

“Not that,” he told her. “A drooping daffodil!”

She laughed and said, “Pretty words!” and then left him.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

When Julian went to Manchester again Pamela had a sense of relief. She had kissed him with cold lips when he went and he was surly with her. The scene she had made over the bridge table still rankled with him, and he had not forgiven her. Now, while he was away there would be a respite from these strained relations and a reprieve from night clubs, dinner parties, cocktail parties with people whom she could not bring herself to like, whom indeed she detested. When he was near her and in an amiable mood, when he made love to her again, when he caressed her to make amends for ill-temper, she yielded to him and felt guilty in doing so. He had a physical attraction which even now she could not resist. Her sense of honour and morality went down before it. He was a beautiful animal without conscience and utterly devoid of any moral code. She knew that and yet had made excuses for him, and sometimes had laughed at his cynicism and his light-hearted carelessness of truth and honesty until it had become too flagrant and intolerable.

Now while he was away she could think it out. Think it out. Think it out, at the breakfast table where the morning paper remained unread; afterwards when she was dusting and making her bed; nagging at her mind with a thousand questions while Mrs. Vokes, the charlady, gave forth Cockney monologues; outside the shops in the King's Road; sitting alone in a little green chair in Kensington Gardens; after supper with the wireless turned on but her own problem drowning the news about Palestine and Russian obstruction in Berlin and the questions discussed by the Brains Trust.

What was she going to do about it? At the altar she had made solemn vows to stay by him for better or worse, in sickness and in health, till death did them part. For better or worse? Well, the worst had happened. Nothing had been said in the marriage service about clinging to him in honesty or dishonesty, in truth or in lying, in honour or in burglary, theft, or petty larceny. Queer, that! Was a wife bound to her husband if she discovered him to be a criminal? Was she to cherish him in sickness and in health if he were a bank robber or a gangster?

Julian wasn't as bad as that, but he was certainly breaking the law by operations on the Black Market. Apart altogether from that he was dishonest in his mind. He had tried certainly to cheat at bridge. He had cheated certainly, according to any decent code. He was a complete charlatan, acting a part in

any company, lying glibly to make himself out more important or to hold attention at a dinner table.

‘Perhaps I’m too hard on him,’ she thought, among a thousand thoughts. ‘Perhaps I was brought up in too rigid a code—Mother’s code of the Victorian era—what the dear Queen would do or not do! Father, of course, is the soul of honour, without saying a word about it. Perhaps I expect too much from Julian and exaggerate his weaknesses. He’s very young after all. He may grow out of it and forget his inferiority complex. His lies, as I call them, may be fairy-tales due to excess of imagination, or to boyish vanity. Perhaps I’m a prig. Perhaps I’m a self-righteous little beast. *Tout savoir c’est tout pardonner.* Father thinks that. “To know everything is to forgive everything.” I wonder. Should one forgive a torturer or a sadist? Yes, I suppose so. Christ forgave all sinners. But one can’t condone the crime or the sin. If I go on living with Julian I shall lose all sense of moral values. I shall slip into his loose ways with money and his loose attitude to life.’

Hour after hour, with the cackle of the wireless in her ears but not in her mind, she thought out the problem of marriage in general and her own in particular.

“No, it’s impossible!” she cried out aloud at a moment when Tommy Handley was questioning Colonel Chinstrap.

Once she put her face down on her arms at the table where she had eaten a boiled egg for supper and wept bitterly, her body shaken by sobs while roars of laughter came from that instrument in the corner which by some psychological freak of today young people, and the not very young, like to have as a background to reading or conversation or household work, not listening but letting it dribble on.

Above this noise there came the buzzing of the telephone.

Pamela let it ring for a moment and then lifted the receiver and heard a voice which she knew was that of Langley, Julian’s unpleasant friend. He spoke excitedly.

“Is that you, Julian?”

“No,” answered Pamela. “He’s away.”

Langley thought it was Julian speaking. The noise of the wireless had drowned Pamela’s low voice.

“I just wanted to say that things are going well—with that film racket. The city is prepared to put up the money on the strength of Lord Bramley’s name. I

suppose it's all right about that? It might be a bit awkward if your honoured father-in-law heard that his name was being used without his consent. What do you say? What's that? I can't hear you. Have you got your wireless turned on?"

Pamela was near enough to the wireless to switch it off with her right hand while she held the receiver with the other.

"You're not talking to Julian," she said. "He's away. What's that about my father's name? Tell me, please."

She spoke with distress. Had Julian been making use of her father's name for one of his crooked schemes? The thought made her furious. It was one of the things she couldn't tolerate. It was unforgivable.

Langley was obviously disconcerted.

"Oh, I'm so sorry, Pamela. I thought it was Julian. Excuse me. There was such a noise on the telephone."

"Has Julian been using my father's name?" she asked insistently.

Langley hesitated and tried to evade a direct answer.

"A small group of us are trying to start a new film company—to fill the void, you know, by the Government quota on American films. It's a great opportunity. Julian is very keen on it."

"Has he been using my father's name?" she asked again. "I insist upon knowing."

"I've no doubt it's quite all right," answered Langley. "I'm sure Julian wouldn't use your father's name without his consent."

"He hasn't said a word to me about it," said Pamela. "How dare any of you use my father's name for one of your shady rackets!"

Langley laughed uneasily down the telephone.

"Oh, that's unkind. Not a shady racket. Everything's quite above board, my dear Pamela."

"Don't call me Pamela," she said heatedly. "It's impertinent."

"Oh, sorry. I didn't know you felt like that. Julian and I are good friends."

"So much the worse for Julian," said Pamela. "He's surrounded by crooks and racketeers."

"My dear lady——"

She jammed down the receiver. Her face felt hot. She was hot and tingling all over. She would never forgive Julian if he had been hawking her father's name about without his permission, and she felt certain that he had not given it. She had seen him a few days ago in his London flat and he had said nothing about it. Surely he would have spoken about it when they were actually discussing Julian's way of life?

She dialled his number. There was just a chance that he was still in town. The House of Lords had been debating various bills sent up by the Commons. When she asked for him he answered.

"Yes. Lord Bramley speaking."

"Father, it's Pam."

His voice softened.

"Hullo, my dear! How are you?"

"Father, I want to ask you something."

"Go ahead. Don't make it too difficult."

"Father, have you given Julian permission to use your name for a new film company? As one of his backers, I suppose."

There was a pause before he answered.

"It's the first I've heard about it."

"How disgraceful!" cried Pamela. "Oh, Father, this is the last straw. I can't go on. Julian is just a shady swindler. I can't trust him an inch."

Lord Bramley answered her soothingly.

"Don't jump off the deep end, my dear. Of course Julian has no right to make use of my name without telling me, but I don't want it to make you unhappy or break things between you and Julian."

"I *am* unhappy," answered Pamela. "And this smashes everything. I can't forgive him for using your name for some dirty business."

Lord Bramley answered with a quiet laugh.

"Perhaps it isn't dirty. It sounds interesting—a new film company. I might get a walking-on part!"

Pamela did not answer with a laugh. To her this was no laughing matter.

"Father, you're too forgiving. Do you want your name dragged into the dirt? Do you want to be associated with a bunch of crooks?"

Lord Bramley was silent for a moment and then answered more seriously.

"Well, no. If you put it like that, Pam."

"Julian is in a bad crowd," said Pamela. "They couldn't play straight if they wanted to. I'm the wife of a racketeer, Father. I've had enough of it. I want to come home and get clean again. I want to escape from a crook. Oh, Father!"

She began to cry and he heard her sobs down the telephone.

"Sorry, Pam," he said. "Sorry, my dear. Don't act hastily. Think it over. Perhaps you can give him another chance."

"No!" cried Pamela. "He's dragging me into the mud with him.... Good night, Father."

"God bless you, my dear," said her father.

She put back the receiver and wept again, crouched on the floor with her arms on a low chair.

A telegram came next day from Julian.

Back at four thirty love Julian.

He sent her his love. He still loved her, perhaps, in his animal way. What did he mean by love? Did it mean anything noble or spiritual in his mind? Did it mean loyalty and comradeship? How could it mean that when he kept her in the dark, hid things from her? She didn't want more from him than that just ordinary honesty. She didn't want him to be a saint or an exalted idealist.

She had tried to be on the level with him, but she couldn't stoop as far as cheating with him at cards, swindling the tradespeople, doing business on the Black Market, consorting with a shady low-minded set of friends. He knew how she reverenced her father, how touchy she was if ever his name were brought into conversation to impress Julian's crowd. "My father-in-law, Lord Bramley." She had loathed that. Now he had used her father's name to get money out of the city, whatever that might mean, as a backing for a film company. He had hidden that from her. It was another form of cheating, and it was his wife he cheated.... *Love Julian*. There was no meaning in it! That too was a lie.

She went through the day according to ordinary routine. Mrs. Vokes came to clean. Pamela did some shopping in the King's Road. She lunched off a boiled egg and toast with three cups of tea. Julian would be back at 4.30. She would have it out with him. She wouldn't leave a note on the mantelpiece like

women in novels, when they left their husbands. She would tell him that she was going and why she was going.

At a quarter past four that afternoon there was a ring at the front door of the flat. It couldn't be Julian. He had his key. She didn't want any visitor. She wanted to be alone with Julian for this last quarrel, as it was bound to be. He would put up a defence. He would tell more lies. He would shout at her and get angry. If only he wouldn't try to make love to her——

The bell rang again and then, after a pause, once more.

It might be another telegram from Julian saying that he wouldn't be back that evening after all.

She went and opened the door.

A girl, about her own age, stood there. She was in a cheap-looking coat and skirt of the utility kind, but neat enough. Rather a pretty girl, thought Pamela, though she had put on too much lipstick and looked rather common and sluttish. She stared at Pamela and then gave a queer, cheeky kind of smile.

"Yes?" asked Pamela.

"Is Captain Inchbold at home?" asked the girl after a moment's hesitation.

"No, he's on his way from Manchester. But he'll be back in a quarter of an hour or so."

The girl stared at Pamela curiously and with that cheeky smile.

"Oh well, could I come in and wait?"

"Who are you?" asked Pamela.

The girl gave a giggle.

"Well," she answered, "it *may* surprise you a bit. I expect you're living with him, aren't you? It may come as a bit of a shock to you, dearie. But I happen to be Mrs. Inchbold. I happen to be his wife, though he won't thank me for turning up and reminding him of the fact. It's seven years since I've seen him! That was when he married me in a registry office in Rugby. Yes, I thought you'd be a bit surprised, dearie. I don't suppose he's ever told you about Sally Bradshaw who went to the Council school with him."

Pamela's face had whitened. This girl was saying unbelievable things as though she believed them. Perhaps she was a blackmailer. She had read about blackmailing women. Or perhaps she was some little slut whom Julian had known before he went into the Army.

“Come in,” she said. “My husband will be back soon.”

The girl followed her into the little sitting-room and looked round with that smile of bravado and impudence.

“Very nice!” she remarked. “Very cosy! Julian seems to have done himself well. But he’s not your husband, dearie. He’s mine. Sorry and all that. Thought I’d better look him up again now I’m demobilized from the A.T.S. It’s about time he handed me a little brass. After all, I am his legal wife though he tries to forget it, no doubt. He always was a dirty dog, though very good-looking, don’t you think?”

She was as cool as a cucumber. She was brazen. Pamela felt a queer sensation of having been stunned. She felt stiff around the neck so that it was difficult to move her head. A slight sweat had come into the palms of her hands. Curiously she was impelled to defend Julian against this harpy, this little, over-painted slut.

“Have you come on a blackmailing errand?” she asked. “If so, I shall send for the police.”

The girl turned vicious at once. The mocking smile left her face and there was a look of fury in her eyes.

“Now don’t get off that kind of stuff!” she said in a shrill voice. “You’d better keep a civil tongue in your head. You’re no more than a harlot living in sin with my man. Don’t think I haven’t come with proof. I’ve the certificate of marriage in my handbag. A blackmailing errand? If it’s the police you want, send for ’em. It’s you they’ll turn out, you hoity-toity bit of muck. Daughter of a Peer, aren’t you? Oh yes, I read all about it in the papers. ‘Peer’s daughter marries Labour Member’s son.’ Quite a sensation! Captain Julian Inchbold. Very comic! ‘I’ll be after you, my man,’ I thought, when I saw his photo in the picture papers. What about a registry office in dear old Rugby? A boy-and-girl marriage, but quite legal, you know. All written down and witnessed. Costs a shilling to get a copy of the wedding-certificate. Captain Julian Inchbold, son-in-law of Lord Bramley. Oh, very funny! Enough to make a cat laugh. ‘My word,’ I thought, ‘there’ll be a fine old scandal when I appear on the scene.’ But I was in no hurry, mind you. I’ll be perfectly honest about it. I was living with a very nice sergeant—no sham marriage and all that stuff—just honest-to-God cohabitation. Isn’t that the nice word for it? ‘I’ll wait till I get demobbed,’ I thought. ‘Then I’ll give Master Julian the shock of his life.’ How did he think he could get away with it? That beats me. Marrying you in church. His name in all the papers. Did he think I wouldn’t get to hear of it? Or did he think he could buy me off?”

She gave a giggling laugh and then spoke more quietly.

"Mind you, everyone has his price and especially *her* price. If you think it's worth while to keep the beautiful Julian and to save your noble family from scandal I wouldn't say I'd hold out against a friendly arrangement. There's no jealousy on my part. I don't want Julian back. He never did run straight—not even as a young fellow just out of school. Of course I fell for him for a time. He looked like a young god. All the girls in Rugby were daft about him. We had a nice week together, properly married, you know, before he was taken for the Army. Never wrote me a line after that! Did I break my heart? No, dearie! I took up with a nice boy in Rugby. I was sorry when he got killed in the Blitz. I almost forgot Julian until I saw his marriage in the papers. His marriage? Why, he's a dirty little bigamist! If I liked I could have him sent to prison. Not that I've come here to be nasty. I just want to talk it over. I'm prepared to shut my mouth if it's worth anybody's while to keep it shut. See what I mean, dearie?"

Pamela looked at her haughtily and answered with icy coldness.

"That's blackmail. I don't believe a word you say about your marriage. You're just a blackmailing hussy. Please go before I send for the police."

The girl breathed hard and the fury came into her eyes again.

"You putty-faced little fool!" she cried. "I've a good mind to give you a slosh over the beak. I'll spoil your doll's face for you if I have any more lip like that."

Suddenly she changed her tone.

"Better talk it out friendly for your own sake. I'm kind-hearted really. I'm sorry for you if you'd only talk civil. Julian did the dirty on you and didn't tell you a word about me, I bet, but I'm ready to be a good sport. Not a word will pass my lips if I get a nice little allowance, which is only fair. And I won't open my mouth too wide neither. I'll be satisfied with six pounds a week, only it must be in writing, and done by a lawyer with witnesses and all that. Now, dearie, don't go putting my back up by calling me dirty names. Your father Lord Bramley—I turned him up in *Who's Who* in the Public Library—can well afford six pounds a week to keep a big scandal out of his family. I'll be the ghost in the cupboard and I won't pop out to spoil his dinner parties. It's worth it to you, isn't it? It's worth it to Julian. I'm making a fair offer in a friendly spirit."

"I shall ring for the police," said Pamela.

She walked towards the telephone and then stopped.

There was the noise of a key in the front-door lock. It was Julian back again.

"Hullo, Pam!" he called out in the little hall.

"I know that voice," said the girl with a smirk. "It's darling Julian. He won't like you to send for the police, dearie. Bigamists don't send for the police."

"Are you there, Pam?" called out Julian again.

Pamela did not answer and he came into the room with a bunch of tulips in a wisp of paper.

"Why don't you answer?" he asked. "Look, these tulips are pretty good, aren't they? Say it with flowers, as the Americans remark in sentimental moods."

He held out the tulips with a smile which faded from his face when he turned from Pamela to this girl of whom he became aware.

"Hullo, Julian!" she said jauntily. "Remember me, don't you?"

He dropped his bunch of tulips, staring at her. For a moment all colour left his face and a frightened look came into his eyes. Then he seemed to pull himself together.

"Why do you come here?" he asked. "What's your game?"

"No game, dearie," answered the girl who had called herself Sally. "Just a friendly and forgiving visit from a deserted wife to her naughty husband who didn't write her a line when he left for the wars."

"What the devil are you talking about?" asked Julian savagely. "Clear out or I'll push you out."

"No you won't, Julian darling," said Sally. "You're only bluffing, my boy. You know damn' well that I can have you lagged as a bigamist any time I like to go to the police. This little mistress of yours has been threatening me with the police. I like that! She thinks I've come to blackmail you, not knowing my kind heart."

"Then what have you come for?" asked Julian fiercely.

The girl looked at herself in a little mirror which she pulled from her handbag and smiled at her own image.

"Now, don't get excited, Julian," she said after this scrutiny of herself. "Let's talk it out quietly. I don't intend to scream out from the house-tops

unless you turn nasty and want to do the dirty on me. I've told Pamela—yes, I know her name—that I'll keep mum if you and her rich Dad will make me a nice little allowance of six pounds a week. That's moderate, ain't it?—I mean isn't it? Six pounds a week and nothing more said. All scandal avoided. I'm sure you understand, dear Julian. And by the way how's your father? In the House of Commons, they tell me. Oh, we've all moved up a bit! Quite a change from the Council houses in Rugby. What do you say, Julian?"

Julian had sat down on a low stool as though suddenly tired.

"You little she-devil!" he said. "I'd like to strangle you."

Sally Bradshaw, as she had been once, gave her mocking laugh which Pam had already heard.

"Yes, I dare say you would. But you haven't the pluck to do that even though they have abolished the death penalty for second-class murders. Now, do a bit of thinking, dearie. Take your time. No hurry. I'll smoke one of my own cigarettes as no one offers me one. Very costly, aren't they? Quite an expense. That's why I want an allowance for holding my tongue."

She lit a cigarette after putting it into a little holder and puffed out a wreath of smoke.

Pamela had been listening to them. She was standing where she had moved towards the telephone before Julian had come in.

She spoke to Julian from that distance.

"Do you know this woman, Julian?" she asked.

He answered in a low voice.

"I used to know her."

"Did you marry her?"

There was a long silence broken at last by Sally Bradshaw, as she had once been known.

"Tell her, Julian duckie. Own up."

"It was a marriage which meant nothing," he said. "It wouldn't hold in law. Boy and girl stuff."

"You liar!" cried Sally fiercely. "Here's the certificate in my handbag. Everything O.K. 'Julian Inchbold married to Susan Bradshaw, Sept. 11, 1939.' Look at it. Is there anything wrong with it, you bigamous little beast?"

She pushed a bit of paper over to Julian at arm's length and gave a scream

when he grabbed it, tore it twice and let the pieces drop to the floor among the tulips at his feet.

He stood up, strode over to the girl, and seized her in his strong arms.

“Clear out!” he shouted. “I’ll chuck you downstairs.”

She struggled like a wild cat but he was very strong and got her out into the passage, opened the front door and pushed her out. Then he banged the door and came into the sitting-room.

“Sorry, Pamela,” he said with a queer kind of laugh. “All very squalid.”

He stooped down and picked up the pieces of the marriage certificate and dropped them into his waste-paper basket.

“How about a cup of tea?” he asked.

He was playing for time. He was trying to steady his shaken nerve. Perhaps he wanted time to think out some way of escape in the eyes of Pamela. What lies should he tell?

Pamela spoke very quietly.

“Julian, I’m going to leave you. I’m going now. I made up my mind last night before this woman came.”

He looked staggered and his face paled.

“Do you mean you want to chuck me?”

“If you like to use that word. I’ll put a few things in a bag.”

She moved towards their bedroom but he rushed at her and held her back.

“You shan’t leave me!” he cried in a strangled voice. “You can’t leave me. You’re mine.”

“I’m going,” she told him, struggling to get free.

He held her tighter, kissing her lips though she tried to turn her face away from him.

“Haven’t I loved you?” he asked. “Don’t we love each other? Haven’t I given you happy times?”

“Yes,” she said. “Yes. At the beginning.”

“And now,” he asked fiercely, “what’s the matter with me now?”

“You’re a liar and a cheat,” she told him. “I’ve found you out.”

He let her go and walked to the other end of the room and then turned with a look of anger.

"Blast it," he said. "That's not the way to talk of a man who has loved you. What's your quarrel with me? Haven't I given you a good time? What's all this about lying and cheating? I don't like the words."

She was as pale as a ghost but spoke quietly again but with tragic intensity.

"You've always lied to me from the very beginning. You've always worn a laughing mask. At first I called you my Greek faun, but sometimes the mask came off and what I saw frightened me. I'm frightened now. This woman has frightened me. She's telling the truth. You married her before you married me. You don't deny it."

"The law wouldn't hold us to it," he answered sullenly. "After nine years of desertion on both sides."

She spoke in a tragic voice, very low.

"You stood at the altar with me. You made solemn vows. That's the most terrible of all. Have you no kind of conscience?"

"All that was mockery," he answered. "I didn't believe in it anyhow. You made me go through with it."

"How could you stand there," she asked, "plighting your troth to me in the presence of God and with that woman as your wife? It was a sin against the Holy Ghost."

"Holy bunkum!" he answered. "All that means nothing to me except the superstition of the Middle Ages."

"It was treachery to me," she said. "It was cheating me of my marriage day."

"Bosh!" he shouted in a loud, angry voice. "Aren't we living in a modern age? Haven't we put all that stuff behind us? You were my woman, I was your man. Isn't that enough? Supposing I'd had three wives and then found you? Wouldn't love between us make the real marriage and wipe out the others? Divorce is easy nowadays. I could have got a divorce from Sally if I'd wanted it. But what difference do a few lines of legal jargon make—a decree nisi by an old judge in a wig? I'm a humanist. I believe in cutting out all conventions."

"Except at the bridge table," she said bitterly.

"Oh, hell!" he shouted. "Don't bring that up again."

"Something happened last night," she told him. "Your friend Langley rang

up. He thought you were speaking when I answered the ‘phone. I found out that you’ve been using Father’s name without his consent for some racket of yours in the film world.”

“Racket be damned!” Julian glared at her. “It’s a perfectly legitimate scheme. It’s going to make pots of money.”

“You didn’t ask Father. You didn’t say a word about it to me. I won’t have Father’s name dragged into the dirt.”

“That family stuff!” he sneered. “I’m sick of it. You’re all snobs at heart though you pretend to be liberal and democratic. You think you belong to a different clay. You’re haunted by your moth-eaten ancestors who were mostly crooks.”

He was taking the offensive as the best line of defence but she ignored all that.

“I’m going. I shall never see you again.”

He shouted at her and grabbed her arm.

“No, you shan’t go! You belong to me. Why should you leave me in the lurch? Wife or mistress, what does it matter? Do you want the whole world to know? What about your father’s noble name? The illustrious Lord Bramley, England’s Elder Statesman. Think of that, can’t you? I’ll kill you if you try to go!”

She felt his terrible strength. His eyes were blazing in a mad way. He was breathing hard as he flung her to the floor. She fell across the tulips which he had brought her as a love token.

Julian looked down at her and gave a kind of sob. Then he strode out of the room, grabbed a hat in the hall and flung himself out of the flat, banging the front door behind him.

Pamela lay on the floor bruised and hurt and weeping. Presently she raised herself on her knees and picked up one of the tulips, bruised like herself. She touched it with her lips and her tears watered it. She stood up holding the back of a chair, feeling dazed and giddy. Her eyes glanced at the little clock on the mantelshelf. She had brought it from Germany. Could it be only five o’clock? It seemed hours since that woman had come—Julian’s wife.

She did not even go into the bedroom. He might be back at any moment. She looked round the little room which he and she had furnished. It had been her little paradise until the serpent hissed. She had been very happy here, and then tortured. Now for a moment she thought only of the happiness and it

made her weep again with a dreadful violence of anguish.

Five minutes later she left her home, bare-headed, carrying nothing. She hailed a taxi and drove to the big glass-windowed block in Chesham Place where her father had a flat.

"Is my father in?" she asked the hall porter.

He stared at her curiously for a moment, and then answered politely.

"Yes, madam, his lordship returned a few minutes ago. I'll take you up in the lift."

Her father opened the door.

"Come in, my dear," he said tenderly.

When the door was shut she flung herself into his arms.

"Father, I've come back again!" she cried. "I've left Julian."

CHAPTER XXXIX

It was some time before Julian's family knew that Pamela had fled from him. Marjorie was the first to suspect that something had gone wrong. There was no answer to her bell when she called at the flat more than once. That was queer, she thought. Pamela was generally in for tea between four and five, at which time Marjorie had not only rung but made a tattoo on the little brass knocker. Nor was there any answer to her telephone calls.

"Those two seem to have done a bunk," she told her mother. "Julian is probably escaping from the police or his unpaid creditors."

"Don't talk like that, dearie, about your own brother," said Mrs. Inchbold, distressed by this accusation against Julian. "I can't think why you are always nagging at him. I'm proud of him."

"Pride goeth before a fall, Ma," said Marjorie. "One day he'll break your heart by disgracing the whole family."

"I've a good mind to slap you!" cried Mrs. Inchbold angrily. "You're a hard little hussy. I'm sorry for the boy who falls in love with you."

Marjorie gave a hoot of laughter.

"More than one boy, Ma! At least half a dozen, and they all seem to like it. I brace them up!"

The next time she rang the bell at Pamela's flat the door was opened by Julian who scowled at her for a moment and then decided to speak civilly.

"Hullo, Margarine! Pamela's out but I can make you a cup of tea. I'm having one myself."

"Thanks," said Marjorie, "I don't mind if I do. I thought you people had done a bunk. I've called three times. Where's Pam? You haven't murdered her, I suppose, and hidden her body under the floorboards?"

She sniffed with sham suspicion for the smell of a dead body.

Julian grinned at her but answered with a threat.

"If you don't behave yourself, my child, I'll pour the tea over your head. Have some toast? I made it myself."

"Very self indulgent!" replied the incorrigible Marjorie. "What's wrong

with bread and butter? By the way where is Pamela?"

Julian answered carelessly.

"Staying with her noble family for a while."

Later on Marjorie said she wanted a wash. That was just an excuse to snoop round Pamela's bedroom and have a look at her frocks and dressing-table things—all very beautiful she thought—all priceless with cut-glass and silver tops and silver-backed brushes and dinky little cases for powder and lipstick. But if Pamela were staying with her family why hadn't she taken these things with her? She couldn't have a double set of them, surely? And her summer frocks were in the wardrobe. Even her silk pyjamas were in the chest of drawers which Marjorie opened stealthily lest Julian should object. It was all very odd, she thought. Everything was here except Pamela. It looked as though she had just left the house for a few minutes. Julian was probably lying, she thought, unless he had really murdered the girl.

This thought had come to her humorously just to tease Julian, but for a moment in Pamela's bedroom she was panic-stricken.

'Oh lord!' she thought. 'I wouldn't put it past him.' Looking into Pamela's mirror she saw her own eyes with a sudden look of horror in them. Then she pulled herself together and grinned. Her imagination was getting out of hand. She went back to Julian singing a tune from 'Bless the Bride'—*La belle Marguerite!*

"Shut up!" said Julian. "I'll have complaints from my neighbours if you make a row like that. What have you been doing all this time in Pam's room?"

"Snooping around," she admitted genially. "Nice things on the dressing-table. All very tasteful. Charming, charming!"

She spoke like a lady of high society in a languid drawl.

Suddenly she made him angry by a cheeky question.

"I suppose Pam hasn't run away from you by any chance? She hasn't found you out, I hope?"

Julian had been pretty good-natured with her up to now but at those words he became pink with rage and made a dash at her and boxed her ears smartly.

"You little slut!" he shouted. "Get out of here before I knock you about. What the devil do you mean by saying a thing like that? It's outrageous. You've been utterly spoilt by Father and Mother. You haven't been taught manners."

“I’ve been taught to tell the truth and shame the devil,” she answered. “It’s more than you can say, my beautiful one.”

“Get out!” said Julian again.

“Gracefully I go,” she told him. “With all the dignity of the upper middle class I depart. Farewell, my blue-eyed Captain.”

He was glad to get rid of her.

It was her father who first heard the truth, deeply painful and humiliating to him. He was surprised to get a note from Lord Bramley one afternoon in the House asking him to take a cup of tea with him on the Terrace at four o’clock.

I want to discuss family affairs [he wrote], *and I shall be greatly obliged if you will spare me a few minutes.*

It was impossible to refuse this request from his son’s father-in-law, though he felt very loth to be seen taking tea with him. His brother-members of the Labour Party would grin at this juxtaposition with a noble lord. It would make him feel a fool and to some extent a traitor to his class, though he was beginning to get over his prejudice against anyone with a title. There were too many Labour Peers to keep up that tradition.

‘Family affairs?’ What did he mean by that? It made him feel a trifle uneasy.

At four o’clock that afternoon he met the old man, not wearing an overcoat as usual, though there was a cold touch to the wind on the Terrace in spite of brilliant sunshine which flooded the tawny water of the Thames and sparkled in the innumerable windows of Parliament.

Lord Bramley held out his hand.

“Glad to see you, Inchbold, I think we can talk here without being overheard.”

“Not without being observed,” answered Inchbold guardedly.

“Oh, I don’t care about that! It won’t interest anybody.”

It interested several people. Stephen Inchbold saw one of his colleagues give a nudge to another as he passed with Lord Bramley to an empty table. That gesture was followed by a guffaw plainly audible.

Lord Bramley snapped his fingers at a waiter and said, “Two teas,

Brindle."

He knew the waiter's name, observed Inchbold.

"Certainly, my lord."

He made a few remarks about the weather, which had been marvellous, and when the tea was brought spoke to the waiter again.

"How are the two boys?"

"Fine, my lord! One of them is going in for a scholarship."

"That's grand. Good luck to him."

"Thank you, my lord."

Inchbold wondered if this familiarity with the waiter could be in the nature of a pose or a code. *Noblesse oblige* and all that. But glancing at the old man with his delicately cut face and humorous smile he could not charge him with insincerity.

When the waiter had gone Lord Bramley lowered his voice, which was very resonant and carrying.

"I suppose Julian has told you?"

Stephen Inchbold stared at him and raised his eyebrows, hiding a deep sense of uneasiness.

"Told me what?" he asked. "Nothing wrong, I hope? I haven't seen him lately."

Lord Bramley glanced at him sharply under his shaggy white eyebrows.

"Perhaps he has kept away. It's bad news, Inchbold. I'm sorry if I'm the first to tell you."

Stephen Inchbold felt himself getting pale and his heart seemed to miss a beat. What the devil had Julian been doing?

"Tell me," he said.

Lord Bramley spoke quietly after glancing at a friend to whom he nodded as he passed down the Terrace.

"Pamela has left him. He seems to have been married before. I'm sure you didn't know."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Stephen Inchbold. His face was grey now and he stared sombrely at the Elder Statesman.

The old man nodded.

“Yes. Tragic for my poor girl. The fellow deceived her. That religious service, those solemn vows. How could he go through with it?”

“This is terrible news,” said Inchbold harshly. “Have you any proof?”

“He admitted it to my girl,” said Lord Bramley. “The other woman turned up. He married her just before the War at a registry office. She doesn’t seem to be a very nice girl. She was ready to be bought off.”

Stephen Inchbold groaned and his head drooped a little on to his chest as he sat there hunched up in his chair.

“I’m sorry for you, my dear fellow,” said Lord Bramley in a kindly voice. “He has let you down as well as us. It’s no fault of yours, of course. If I may say so I have complete faith in your integrity.”

Stephen Inchbold was silent for quite a time. His face seemed to have sagged. He looked older.

“That boy of mine,” he said presently, “has been a thorn in my flesh. I’ve never been able to trust him. But this is”—he paused for a moment and then said—“unpardonable and abominable.”

“Yes, it’s a bad business,” said Lord Bramley. “In a way it has ruined my daughter’s life, poor child. But the point is, what are we going to do about it?”

“Prosecute him for bigamy,” Inchbold answered harshly. “He deserves any punishment he gets. I wash my hands of him for ever. He’ll drag my name into the mud.”

Suddenly he laughed harshly. “That’ll sound funny to you. My name! As though I were one of the old nobility instead of having been born in a slum.”

Lord Bramley did not see anything funny in this reference to Inchbold’s name. He answered with sympathy.

“Your name, my dear fellow, stands high in the House of Commons even among your political opponents.”

Stephen Inchbold seemed touched by those words. He looked up at the old man and spoke in a broken voice.

“You’re damned generous. In your position I should have cursed the name of Inchbold and all its breed.”

Lord Bramley made a gesture with his thin, long hands as though dismissing that.

“Curses do no good,” he answered, “and I don’t believe in family vendettas. I suppose there will have to be a case in Court in order to liberate my daughter. I’m sorry about that. I hate publicity about one’s private affairs and it will be hard on Pam.”

“I’m deeply sorry for your daughter,” said Inchbold. “I was afraid from the beginning that things wouldn’t go right.”

“Well,” said Lord Bramley, “we must do our best to put things right as far as possible, though for Pam it’s an open wound, hard to heal, I fear.”

He rose and nodded to Inchbold.

“I expect you’re busy. The debate tonight ought to be interesting. I’m speaking in the Lords tomorrow, worse luck. I’ll keep in touch with you over this tragic business, if I may.”

He raised a hand and walked away, stopping at the end of the Terrace for a few words with an ex-Minister.

Inchbold sat alone, hunched over the table until one of his fellow members came up and put a hand on his shoulder and spoke chaffingly.

“How soon are you and the noble lord going to be grandfathers of the same child?”

“Shut up!” answered Stephen Inchbold sullenly. “I’m in no mood for that kind of blather.”

CHAPTER XL

Pamela went back to Longacre with a sense of physical weakness as though all vitality had been sapped and drained out of her. This weakness made it difficult for her to stop weeping when she was alone. For a time she felt broken and bruised in spirit. Life seemed to have no more meaning or purpose for her. She had made a mess of it, a hideous mess, from which she thought she would never get clean. Julian would always be a haunting presence. She would never be able to put him out of her mind or free herself from him. She had married, or thought she had married, a young satyr with a cloven hoof and though she had escaped from him she had heard the pipes of Pan and gone with him into the dark forest of passion and primitive love. She was no longer bound to him. She had never been his wife according to the law because of that other woman, that dreadful creature, but she would always be tied to him.

Perhaps the beauty of Longacre, where she had spent her childhood, was too poignant in contrast to her painful memories. Its gardens were neglected for lack of labour but marvellous weather for an English spring had filled them with loveliness. The old fruit trees in the orchard were already laden with blossom, to their future peril. The grass beneath them was spangled with wild flowers of silver and gold. The terrace and the rock garden had banks of flowering plants, white, blue, purple and gold. The wisteria was flowering on the walls. The scent of lilac made the air fragrant about the lawns. Even the chestnut trees were putting up their candlesticks a month too soon. And beyond Longacre, in the woods above the house there were long vistas of blue as though a summer sky had fallen there. There were multitudes of bluebells in these glades between the birch trees and once Pamela, walking alone there, knelt down among them and wept because of this loveliness which was exquisite and painful in her mood of self abasement. As a child she had screamed with joy at the sight of the first bluebells and the first shout of the cuckoo. The cuckoo was calling now through the woods and Pamela wept because that ecstasy of childhood came back to a besmirched and bedraggled woman, as she felt.

Only alone and in secret did these tears flow. She did not give way in the presence of others according to the code of courage which she had been taught by nurses and governesses and the family tradition.

Her mother reminded her of this.

“Keep a stiff upper lip, child,” she said after embracing her when she arrived home. “I’m terribly sorry, of course. But you will remember my hostility to your marriage. I don’t want to say ‘I told you so’.”

She forgot conveniently that her hostility had been broken down by the spell of Julian’s charm and good looks. Now she had nothing good to say about him after the shock of revelation that he had been married before.

“We shall have to do a little bit of camouflage,” she said. “You’ll have to say that Julian has gone away on business or something. Of course, ultimately, the story of his atrocious bigamy is bound to come out. It will be a great shock to the neighbourhood.”

“I don’t care tuppence about the neighbourhood, Mother,” answered Pamela. “It’s my affair and it’s bad enough.”

“Don’t say you weren’t warned,” said her mother again. “You were terribly obstinate, Pam. You were very careless about your father’s name and the family reputation. You had no respect for my own feelings. I knew from the first that it was a tragic mistake. One can’t mix the breeds, if I may say so bluntly. It was like running away with a groom or a mechanic. It was a degradation, my dear. A Faraday must not marry outside her class, still less the son of a Labour man.”

“Mother!” cried Pamela. “For heaven’s sake don’t talk like that. I can’t bear it. It’s all that Julian holds up against us—arrogance and snobbishness and class hatred.”

“Rubbish, child!” answered Lady Bramley. “No one in the world is less of a snob than I am. But facts are facts. I have a strong belief in heredity. Didn’t I breed cocker spaniels? Anyhow I know your courage, my dear. You’ll need it. Don’t show the white feather, especially to our guests and neighbours.”

“I don’t want to see any of them,” said Pamela. “I want to be alone.”

As it happened there were a good many visitors just then. They came to call on her father who had made a big speech in the House of Lords pleading for a union of Christian democracy in Europe as a defence—the only defence he thought—against the advance of Communism. It had excited the clergy of England in all denominations and several of them came to urge Lord Bramley to address a big meeting at the Albert Hall on this subject. Other people came, such as Gerald Jerningham, the economist, with his vulture-like look and eighteenth-century manner.

In the drawing-room and now and then at the dinner table Pamela had to hide her secret agony and smile and look pleasant and ask intelligent questions,

and put on a mask of interest and amiability. It wasn't easy.

There were two people missing from the table and their empty chairs were a reminder to Pamela that her own tragedy was not the only one in the world or in this house. Robin Melville was missing. Henriette had fled. She had gone back to France to her own people. Nigel was left alone with his loom and his enemy Pain and his mysticism.

"Poor old Nigel!" said Pamela, up in his room on the first evening of her return. "You and I have had a rough deal but mine is nothing compared with yours because of that horrible pain."

"I'm all right," he told her. "I'm putting up a good fight against the enemy. Sometimes I forget him. I'm learning to liberate my mind and spirit from the habitation of the flesh. Still, I must admit I'm not very far advanced yet in the science of Yogi."

He smiled at her and then spoke about Henriette.

"I'm glad she has gone back to France. Her Provençal blood was frozen by our way of life and our English winters and our time of so-called austerity. It was no fun being tied to a crippled husband in an unwarmed house. There was no joy for her, poor kid. Her nature needed joy."

Pamela was silent. She too had wanted joy. She had had a taste of it. Now she had to pay the price of it.

"Isn't joy an illusion?" she asked presently. "What do you think, Nigel? Don't we expect too much and ask too much in the way of joy? Of course there are brief moments, but it's not spread thickly on our daily bread."

Nigel grinned over his pipe which he was sucking.

"One has to make the most of the moments," he said. "As a boy I had a sense of ecstasy now and then when all the world seemed to be made for me and I for it—a kind of pantheism. I had a sense of joy on my first solo flight, and again when I fell in love with Henriette. I don't forget that I had a good time before I was smashed up. I'm grateful for that."

"Nigel," said Pamela, "you have a kind of philosophy of life. It seems to help you. How am I going to pick myself up again? How am I going on? What's the future for me?"

Nigel answered after a few moments' thought.

"I can't initiate you into my way of thought or my pursuit of truth. It would seem queer stuff to you. You'll have to work out your own way of salvation,

but I should suggest the first step is to forget yourself as far as possible and above all avoid self pity. Do a job of work, old girl. Do something helpful to other people or the world. Then I believe you'll get back a certain serenity. All that's past will fall into the right perspective, and won't seem very important anyhow."

"How am I to find a job of work?" asked Pamela. "I'm as ignorant as the beasts of the field."

Nigel sucked at his pipe and then gave tongue.

"Now that poor old Robin has gone Father wants a new secretary. Couldn't you give him a helping hand? You know how to type, don't you?"

"Blindfold," said Pamela.

"Well, then——"

"It's an idea," she admitted.

"They want the Old Man to save the world," said Nigel with a laugh. "That woman Bosanquet has been after him. And Kit Harington has a great idea of making him leader of a New Crusade. Great stuff!"

At the mention of Kit Harington Pamela felt a sudden lurch at the heart. One day Kit would come down to see her. Perhaps he hadn't heard yet about her leaving Julian. She would have a difficult time with him and she shirked it.

CHAPTER XLI

HARINGTON was busy in the political world. He was getting support from the most unexpected quarters for his New Crusade and his proposal for a new Middle Party between the two extremes of Left and Right. A group of Liberal candidates accepted his programme and thirty of the younger Conservatives were ready to stand for his policy in the next election. One archbishop and four bishops used his book as a text for sermons and addresses. He was drowned in correspondence from unknown people—the majority of them women, but with a strong minority of men—who expressed their passionate hope for a new leadership and a new party inspired by the spirit of his argument. They were sick of the old slogans of Tory speakers. They sickened even more at what they denounced as the falsity and intellectual dishonesty of the Left Wing. They hankered for a return of Liberalism, but the divisions of leadership in the Liberal Party, without unity in its ranks, or any dynamic force and purpose, made that revival hopeless, they thought, as proved in many by-elections where Liberal candidates had forfeited their deposits. But a new Middle Party under powerful leadership—what about Winston?—inspired by a spiritual mission for the defence of the civilized mind, would gain a great allegiance especially among the working women weary of being pushed around, and angry because of so little reward for all their toil and all their sacrifice in the war years and afterwards. So many of them wrote.

Harington was heartened by this correspondence though it nearly overwhelmed him. One of the letters reached him by hand in the House of Commons one afternoon. It was from one of the newspaper peers, owner of the *Daily Sun* and some forty provincial newspapers.

My dear Harington [wrote Lord Eashing], *I have read your book and have been impressed by it. I should like to have a talk with you. Could you come to Eashing House tomorrow afternoon at 3.30?*

Harington felt excited. If Eashing backed him he would have a tremendous machine behind him, a kind of broadcasting station of his own. It would be no hole-and-corner business. Eashing knew how to blow his trumpets with exceeding power. Eashing? Harington began to feel doubtful. Had the fellow

any moral integrity or spiritual purpose? Wasn't the *Daily Sun* just a money-making machine out for the biggest circulation by any means, foul or fair, by any kind of new sensation, driven furiously for a few days and then dropped into cold storage. He had never met the man, but his paper had been attacked in the House from time to time from both sides. It might be dangerous to get into the hands of such a man. It might degrade the whole idea and turn it into a newspaper stunt. Should he go to Eashing House?

He decided to go, and at 3.25 the next afternoon found himself in the lift of a big, imposing office in one of the tributaries of Fleet Street.

"The Chief is waiting for you, Mr. Harington," said a pleasant young man who had come down to receive him and now was taking him up in the lift.

He was shown into a big, well-lighted and well-furnished room on the fourth floor. Behind a desk at the far end of a Persian carpet was a little gnome-like man who was dictating letters to a secretary.

"That'll do, Miss Perkins," he said, when Harington was shown in. "I'll ring when I want you again."

"Very good, Lord Eashing."

The lady vanished. The gnome-like man rose in his chair and held out a hairy little hand.

"Glad to meet you, Harington. Take a seat. Have a cigar."

"No thanks. May I put on a cigarette?"

"Do, but it isn't smoking!"

Harington was aware that Lord Eashing had very piercing and gimlet-like eyes. They were on him now, measuring him up. He seemed to be amused by his visitor's red hair, as his glance rested on it.

"I read that book of yours in bed," he said. "It kept me awake."

"Sorry," said Harington with a grin.

Lord Eashing's thin lips curled to a smile and his little gimlet eyes shot an amused look at Harington.

"I don't keep awake over bad books."

He looked down at his desk and drew a girl's face on his blotting pad.

"Look here," he said, "don't let's waste time by beating about the bush. I like your ideas and I like your spirit, Harington. I'm prepared to back you with the full force of my Press, which is a pretty powerful engine."

Harington hesitated, and Lord Eashing was aware of his hesitation.

"What's on your mind?" he asked sharply. "Isn't my offer any good to you? Most politicians would jump at it."

Harington thrust his fingers through his flame-like hair before answering.

"I don't want to be rude," he said, "but this adventure of mine—I mean this new political campaign—is bigger in purpose than a newspaper stunt, if you'll excuse my saying so."

Lord Eashing scowled at him, but there was a glint of humour in his eyes.

"That's damn' rude all right. If anyone on my staff said a thing like that, I'd throw him out on his ear."

"I'm not on your staff," answered Harington coolly, "but I don't want to be in the least offensive, Lord Eashing. Your support would be valuable, but not if you flung away the idea like an old boot after a week or two. In a way this is a spiritual campaign. It's no good without faith and sincerity. It won't succeed if it hasn't passionate conviction behind it, without any axes to grind."

Lord Eashing played with his pencil again and drew another face on his blotting pad. Then he looked up and grinned at Harington.

"You red-headed fellows can be damned offensive sometimes."

"I'm talking frankly," said Harington.

"Same thing," answered Lord Eashing.

He fingered the wet end of a cigar and took a puff or two before he spoke again.

"I'm not going to say that I haven't been an axe grinder. It has been good fun in a way. I've been a newspaper man first and foremost. Sensationalism, yes, sir! Anything for a scoop. And I've built up the biggest circulation of any paper in England bar one. I'm a Peer of the Realm—not bad for a man who earned five shillings a week as a boy of twelve and went to night classes to get a bit of education."

"It needed courage," said Harington, not without sincerity.

"You bet it did!" agreed Lord Eashing. "I've had a hell of a time, and I dare say I've been pretty ruthless now and then. Lots of enemies waiting to scalp me if they could. Lots of flatterers and fawners now I've got the power. But nobody would describe me as a new St. Francis of Assisi, though as an Irishman I've kept to the faith of my fathers as a bad Catholic, you understand."

He broke off suddenly and asked an abrupt question with a harsh laugh.

"Why the hell am I telling you all this?"

"It's interesting," said Harington.

Lord Eashing pushed himself back in a swing chair and spoke with sudden intensity.

"Look here, Harington, you won't believe it, but I'm not without a certain idealism and a certain faith in the spiritual side of life. Now at sixty-eight years of age I'd like to do something to save the world from destruction and this country from ruin and enslavement. And there's not much time."

"I'm afraid not," said Harington.

Lord Eashing left his chair and began to pace up and down the room with a frightful scowl on his face like some hobgoblin in a rage.

"We're all mouthing and chattering like monkeys in the jungle, while we're advancing towards the great crash. 'Regardless of their doom the little victims play.' Winston is the only man with vision, but he made the mistake of his life when he tied himself up with the Tory machine. That crowd of dead-heads will never get back, in my opinion, but even if they do they'll play the same old game of Party first, and the country will always be faced by the swing of the pendulum between Left and Right.

"If Labour comes in again, as they will if there's no alternative to a Tory majority, the extreme Left will get into the saddle. What's the difference between their policy and Communism—a piece of tissue paper! They'll nationalize us from the cradle to the grave. They'll kill the middle classes, their Public Enemy No. 1. They're already doing so by the guillotine of taxation. They already have an entrenched bureaucracy, costing hundreds of millions. Next time they'll reduce everybody to the lowest common denominator and what used to be called Great Britain will be a satellite state of the U.S.S.R. That's why I'm in favour of a new middle party, holding the balance and taking over the old Liberal tradition. I want to save the country from being the hell of a police state without freedom of faith or freedom of thought. Perhaps in doing so I may cleanse my own soul before I meet my God. There are certain blots—as I must admit—on my ledger!"

He laughed harshly and spoke some Latin words which doubtless he had learnt in a Catholic school.

"*Lavabo me. Domine, hyssopo, et super nivem dealbabor.*"

Christopher Harington was astonished and rather touched by this strange speech of a newspaper peer. The little man seemed to be speaking with sincerity—even with emotion.

When he stopped talking Harington was aware of a tremor in the chair on which he was sitting, and the throb of great machines somewhere below him, in the underground world of Fleet Street and its tributaries.

“I should welcome your aid,” said Harington. “On the strict understanding that it’s not a monopoly of the *Daily Sun*.”

“You have a good head under that red hair,” answered Lord Eashing grudgingly. “Well, let’s get down to it. Tell me how you stand. You’re in for a hell of a fight. If my ideas are any good to you...”

It was past midnight when Harington left the office of the *Daily Sun*. Lord Eashing could pull many wires and knew more than Harington about the forces at work behind the scenes, the strains in the Cabinet, the fears of frightened men, the coming danger of the Extreme Left, the moods and temper of the middle classes, the secret rivalry of men in power, and of men who wanted power. Lord Eashing was going to be a valuable ally.

CHAPTER XLII

HARINGTON was out of England for a week or two having gone over to the Hague with a small group of political friends for the Congress of Europe under the chairmanship of Winston Churchill. He was set on fire by Churchill's vision and oratory, as was the whole assembly who rose to their feet cheering him for many minutes. He had put forward a plea for the common defence of European unity leading up to a World Government by which the shadow of fear and destruction might be lifted for ever from the hearts and minds of men. If this vision be fulfilled, he said, it may be that we shall move into a sunlit age when all the children now growing up in this tormented world may find themselves, not the victors or the vanquished in the fleeting triumph of one country over another in the bloody turmoil of destructive war, but the heirs of the treasures of the past, the masters of all the science, the treasures and the abundance of the future.

Coming out of the Hall of Knights, Harington turned to his ironical and sceptical friend Jaggers and spoke with a flame of enthusiasm.

"Marvellous and wonderful. Winston reached his greatest height. This was his finest day. Those were his noblest words."

Jaggers laughed ironically.

"Great stuff certainly! The old man put it across as usual, but it's only a mirage. It's just the same old idealism of the League of Nations which went down the drain because the nations wouldn't agree. It's hoping too much, my dear Kit. You can't get agreement about anything between a Frenchman, a German and an Englishman. It'll be the same with sixteen nations, only worse."

"It's the only hope of civilized mankind," said Harington with an intensity of emotion.

Jaggers grinned at him.

"There are only tiny oases of civilization in a world of barbarism and therefore mankind is doomed. Believe me, my red-headed idealist!"

"Why don't you go and drown yourself then?" asked Harington furiously.

"Oh, I'll wait for the atom bomb," answered Jaggers. "Until then I shall go

on watching this amusing pantomime."

At the Hague, Churchill had proclaimed the idea—though with more eloquence—which Harington had elaborated in his own book. But Churchill was tied to a party machine—the old Tory machine—and at home would fling himself into that dusty arena, pugnaciously with the old slogans and a tongue like a sword to wound men who had served him loyally in the days of war. If he had lifted himself above all this he would have made the ideal leader of a new centre party, taking over the old Liberal tradition and shaping it to new conditions and new adventures.

Harington came back to an England drenched with beauty. The weather had been magical with warm sunshine and cloudless blue skies. The countryside, as he saw when he went down to Longacre—a letter had been awaiting him in his rooms from old Bramley inviting him down—was so lovely that he was startled by it as though it came as a new revelation. The trees were in full leaf with a thousand tones of delicate green. Little orchards were white with blossom. Cottage gardens were brimful of colour, and beyond them the meadows were spangled with silver and gold.

In the carriage with him, somewhat to his regret, was Gerald Jerningham, that vulture-like economist who lived near Longacre. He had cynical things to say about the Hague Congress.

"One has to back the idea," he said. "I've just written a leading article about it, quite lyrical in its praise of the Grand Design. But it's just a beautiful illusion and all Winston's rhetoric about the little children and the sunlit way of peace doesn't change the grim realities of an Eastern and Western *bloc* with Russia isolating Berlin, and Communism infecting the cells of the mass mind. The whole thing is nothing more or less than a bid by Winston for a military alliance of the Western Powers against the Russian menace. All that stuff about European and World Government is just 'my eye and Betty Martin'."

He gave a sepulchral chuckle as his long thin fingers folded up his *Times*.

Harington answered with some heat.

"You're one of those materialists who would have called Christ an ignorant fanatic and visionary out of touch with the realities of life."

"Wouldn't it be true?" asked Jerningham with a harsh laugh. "Isn't Christianity a complete failure? Has it ever prevailed? Isn't the story of the Christian era one long horror of human folly and cruelty? My dear fellow, this glib idealism makes me sick. It's only throwing dust into the eyes of the victims of the coming war. Let's talk frankly."

“Frankly be damned,” answered Harington. “You so-called realists leave out the power of the Spirit. Don’t you believe in the dynamic force of new ideas and the world behind them? ‘In the beginning was the Word.’ ”

Jerningham smiled with intellectual superiority.

“You’re one of the dreamers, Harington,” he answered. “I’ve read your book. It amused me a good deal. Your new Crusade is just Moody and Sankey or the Oxford Group Movement applied to the international situation and the economic bankruptcy of this hard-stricken land. It won’t produce more textiles from the Lancashire mills. It won’t drag more coal out of the earth. It won’t change our adverse balance of dollars. Theoretically I’m in favour of your Centre Party but if you put up candidates at the next election they’ll lose their deposits, poor devils!”

“If it wouldn’t make a mess on the lines,” said Harington, “I’d throw you out of the window. You’re a blot on the beauty of nature. Look at all this loveliness and ask if there isn’t any meaning behind it beyond your blasted balances and the dollar sign.”

Jerningham laughed with the greatest good nature and a high shrill mirth like a peacock calling to its mate.

“These idealists!” he answered. “Behind that loveliness is the neglect of scientific agriculture, over-high wages for farm labourers, a dearth of cattle and sheep, no afforestation. Beauty, my dear Harington, is very uneconomic.”

“You ought to be drowned,” said Harington. “I could name half a dozen of our leading economists who ought to be drowned with you.”

“We’re the fellows who know,” answered Jerningham with intellectual arrogance. “If this lousy Government would have taken our advice they wouldn’t be in the mess they are with their gigantic plans for spending more millions—hundreds of millions—which we haven’t got and shan’t get. But I had a hectic night and drank too much gin. Wake me at Woking. I’m going to sleep.”

“Thank God!” said Harington.

At Woking Jerningham opened his eyes, yawned loudly and sat up.

“I suppose you’re going to see the Old Man at Longacre?”

Harington nodded. He had been enjoying this respite from annoying argument, watching the unwinding film of beauty beyond the carriage window.

“I suppose you’ve heard that Pamela has left her husband,” said

Jerningham. "A poisonous fellow, I believe."

"What's that?" asked Harington sharply, as though he had been shot.

"She's left that Inchbold man. He had a wife already. Lady Bramley told me about it—in confidence of course—but I never could keep a secret. It's no good telling a secret to an egotist like me. Besides it's bound to come out. I call it a bit of luck for that girl Pamela. She's free of the fellow."

Harington felt his heart miss a beat. Pam had left that fellow Julian? He had had a wife already? "Then one day perhaps..."

His mind took a leap forward. Pam would be free again. Fate had meant them for each other. This was the hand of Fate. It altered everything, this astounding news, dropped casually by this fellow traveller whom he had wanted to throw out of the window.

"May see you during the week-end," said Jerningham, getting out of the train at Guildford. "I propose to take tea with her ladyship for whom I have a high respect. So long, Harington. Don't let me undermine your beautiful idealism. I'll make a dash for the 'bus."

Harington found Lord Bramley's car waiting for him. He might have offered Jerningham a lift but he felt stunned by the news about Pamela. Stunned and yet terribly excited. He had forgotten to take his hat and gloves from the rack in the railway carriage. He walked into the station yard with his red hair aflame in the sunlight to the amusement of two girls in shirts and shorts who nudged each other. One of them said "Carrots!" in an audible voice and gave a squeal of laughter.

Pamela was out that afternoon. She had gone to tea with her father's friend, Julia Bosanquet, and Harington was almost glad. He had a curious sense of shyness at the thought of meeting her again now that she had left Julian and was back in her old home. What should he say to her? How could he look into her eyes without giving himself away and perhaps hurting her? He hadn't been born with much tact. He blurted things out. Words, sometimes the wrong words, leapt from his lips. He had never worn a mask or hidden any intensity of emotion which happened to set him on fire. It would be very difficult to talk to Pam without letting her see the turmoil of his mind and the tremendous hope in his heart. Probably he would behave like a damn' fool. He was in a certain way, he thought, the unwisest man in Christendom, without an atom of conventional restraint. It was all the fault of his red hair. His parents had made a great mistake in giving him red hair. So he thought, thinking ridiculous things, silly emotional things, as he waited for old Meggs to open the door to

him.

“His lordship is in the garden; having forty winks I dare say,” said old Meggs. “It’s her ladyship’s afternoon at the Women’s Institute. Mr. Nigel is in his work-room as usual.”

“I’ll go into the garden,” said Harington.

It was a walk into beauty, closer than the landscape out of a train window. The gardens of Longacre were neglected for lack of labour but Pan the invisible gardener had had his way with them. The tennis court was unmown and carpeted in silver and gold like the meadows he had seen. A bank of rhododendrons made a glory of colour above a bed of wallflowers and violas and big-faced pansies. A golden azalea filled the air with scent like honeysuckle. Old chestnut trees, giant tall, had put up their red-and-white candlesticks. The weedy pathway was bordered by the massed colours of aubrietia and tiny rock plants as delicate as twinkling jewels. Tulips grew tall in unweeded flower beds, their petals like the silks and satins of the French court in the days of the Sun King. No scythe had cut the grass in the paddocks but they were a sea of bluebells—Longacre, once so trimly kept, was a lovely wilderness.

Its master was dozing in the rose garden in a deck-chair with his face to the sun. His finely cut face and thin lips were already bronzed. He was in a grey flannel suit and a Panama hat lay on the grass within arm’s length of his chair. A book had slipped off his knees and Harington saw with a touch of pleasure that it was his own book.

The Old Man, as he was called in the village, opened his eyes and sat up when he saw Harington.

“Hullo, my dear fellow! I was having thirty-nine winks. Fetch a garden chair. There’s one in the summer-house.”

Harington did as he was bid and sat facing the Old Man.

“I feel drunk with this beauty,” he said. “Longacre is a paradise in this enchanting weather.”

Lord Bramley glanced round and gave a smiling groan.

“Paradise lost! The place is going to wrack and ruin. It’s going back to the jungle. Look at those weeds!”

“Even the weeds are glorious,” said Harington. “Those dandelions have the glint of gold.”

Lord Bramley laughed at him good-naturedly.

"A disgrace to any garden. Well, I can't afford more than one gardener. Tell me about the Hague. Winston seems to have been in his best form."

"They cheered him for five minutes," said Harington. "He rose to a great height of oratory. He made my heart thump, and he lit a torch in the spirit of those who heard him."

Lord Bramley smiled again.

"Oratory is not enough," he said. "When its spell passes the cold facts remain. Will Europe unite? Will Russia let Western Europe unite? Is there time?"

Harington raised his eyebrows and uttered a protest.

"Cynicism from you, sir? After your great speech in the Lords on the need of a spiritual renaissance of Europe and mankind. It had an immense effect in the country."

Lord Bramley's keen old eyes twinkled.

"I doubt it! The country is far more interested in the Test Match or dog-racing. Still, I won't shock your young soul by the cynicism of old age. As a matter of fact I'm only a pseudo-cynic, as some of my friends found out long ago. I'm very easily moved by sentiment and idealism. I've been moved by that book of yours. You see I've been reading it again."

He touched the book on the grass with the point of his boot.

"Fine stuff, Harington! I agree with a good deal of it. I wish I could live to see your New Crusade getting under weigh. The defence of the civilized mind. A new centre party uniting moderate opinion. I can't see anything wrong with it, as a hope of the future. Good luck to your political adventure."

Christopher Harington was silent for a few moments. He sat there with a frown on his forehead and a smile on his lips. Then he spoke emotionally.

"Look here, sir, I need your help. I need your great influence and support. I want you to be the leader of this new campaign. There's only one other man in England who could make a triumphant success of it, appealing to the old Liberalism which is dormant in the English minds and forming a new party between the two extremes. That's Winston, of course, but he's enslaved by his loyalty to the Conservative machine. He has tied himself to that old chariot with its creaking wheels. Wherever he goes, the people cheer him and vote against him! But your name, sir—forgive my impertinence—stands for

something very high and very noble in public opinion. If you raised your standard, if you proclaimed yourself Leader of the New Liberals, millions of people who are afraid of the Tories and detest Socialism would rally to you. They're waiting for you. I ask you very humbly and fervently, I beg of you to accept this leadership. That is what I came to say. Now that I've said it I am aghast at my own audacity. But I dare wait in hope of a generous answer."

Lord Bramley seemed touched by this appeal of a red-headed young man.

"My dear fellow," he said, "it's you that are generous. Too generous in thinking so much of me, and wanting me to be captain of a new adventure into stormy seas."

"I'm not alone," said Harington. "Many of my friends—even the most sceptical—name you as the one chance of victory for a new grouping of moderate minds with a spiritual vision."

Lord Bramley shook his head and smiled.

"My dear lad!" he exclaimed. "Have you forgotten my age? You don't want one of the have-beens to lead a new campaign. You don't want a wheezy old fellow with creaking joints to raise your standard. He would stumble and fall with it!"

"I think of Gladstone and his Home Rule Bill," said Harington. "He was getting on for eighty. You are young—as an Elder Statesman."

Lord Bramley gave a great good-humoured laugh.

"Ask my friend the village doctor, old Sandham. He warned me only yesterday that I wasn't as young as I used to be, and mustn't behave like a two-year-old. Talked a lot of nonsense about high blood pressure and a tired heart when it was nothing but a touch of indigestion. Still, there you are, I'm getting old, young fellow!"

Harington was vastly disappointed.

"Not for a long time yet," he insisted. "Not for twenty years or more."

"In the village," said Lord Bramley, "they call me the Old Man. Now look here, Harington, you don't want old dodderers hanging round your neck. I'm speaking seriously. This is a young man's adventure. You need the enthusiasm, the courage and the faith of youth. Cut out the old men, with their caution and their doubts. Go ahead with the younger crowd. Create a new party for a new age. You may come an awful cropper at first, but you're young enough to pick yourself up and ride on. Make that red hair of yours a flaming torch! You have the idea, the faith and the fanaticism."

“Fanaticism?”

Lord Bramley smiled beneath his shaggy eyebrows.

“No big idea can be carried through without fanaticism. It’s no use seeing the other fellow’s point of view—that has always been my weakness.”

“Your strength, sir,” said Harington. “Your tolerance and your fair-mindedness are admired by everybody.”

Lord Bramley’s eyes had a twinkle in them.

“I’m in danger of becoming intolerant,” he said. “Those fellows in the House of Commons give me indigestion, or what old Sandham calls high blood pressure. Some of them on the Labour benches are hand in glove with Moscow and they’re out to kill the poor middle class which has produced most of the genius, most of the big men and women, most of the prosperity in our history as a people. They’re not being given a fair deal—the professional men, the writers, the artists, the small business men. I’ve always been for the under-dog, but now he’s becoming top dog, and he hasn’t quite the quality or the sense of fair play.”

He broke off suddenly, laughed and rose from his chair.

“That sounds like the speech of a die-hard Tory of the old school. Oh well, a plague on both their houses. I’m for your centre party—a revival of the Liberal tradition, call it what you will. Unless it happens we shall be dragooned into Communism and the Police State. I say, what about a cup of tea?”

He put his hand on Harington’s shoulder and they walked together to the house. On the way he glanced sideways at the younger man and said: “I suppose you’ve heard about Pam? Leaving that fellow Julian?”

“Yes,” said Harington in a low voice.

“It was never a real marriage,” said Lord Bramley. “The damn’ fellow had a wife already. Can you believe it? Deliberate bigamy. I’m sorry for Pam, poor darling.”

“Yes,” said Harington.

Lady Bramley came on to the terrace and called out.

“Hullo, Kit! Come and have tea. I’m dying for a cup, after talking to a crowd of cantankerous women....”

They had tea on the terrace in the warm sunshine of a brilliant May.

After tea Lady Bramley retired to her room and the Old Man went in to write some letters. Harington sat on in a deck-chair with the sun on his face and a book which he was not reading on his knees. Presently he saw a girl coming through a gap in the tall hedge of blue cypresses and crossing the lawn. It was Pamela and he rose and went to meet her with a quiet greeting of “Hullo, Pam!”

She was looking pale, he thought, until her face flushed faintly as he took her hand. She wore a summer frock with short sleeves and he remembered her like that in the years before the War when they had played tennis together in the garden and teased each other like Beatrice and Benedick in verbal duels. She had changed a little since those laughing days. Today there were little faint smudges under her eyes as though she had been having sleepless nights, or crying. But to Harington she looked beautiful as he held her hand. She had her back to the sun and it made a halo round her fair hair as though she were a lady angel by Fra Angelico.

“Isn’t it wonderful weather?” he said, feeling shy of her for some foolish reason not to be explained by himself.

“Too good to go indoors,” she answered. “Let’s sit here on the terrace.”

They sat there for something like an hour talking a little but with occasional silences, filled up by a choir of birds.

“That blackbird is a fine performer,” said Pamela after one of those silences. “He’s singing like an operatic star.”

“Birds have the best time,” said Harington. “A short life but a merry one. No party politics. No income tax. No food rationing. No need of clothing coupons.”

Pamela laughed, and he was glad to hear her laugh.

“They fight each other, I’m afraid. Robins especially are little devils, though I must say I love them. One had the cheek to hop into my room this morning while I was dressing.”

“Damned impertinence!” said Harington.

“Tell me about the Hague Congress. Doesn’t it fulfil some of your ideals?”

“The ideals of all peace-loving souls,” said Harington. “But only a hope yet. Only Winston saved it from immediate failure. He was marvellous.”

It was towards the end of an hour, after a three-minutes silence and a solo from an ecstatic thrush, that Pamela spoke of her broken marriage.

“You know I’ve left Julian? Father told you I expect.”

“Yes,” said Harington.

“I was never married to him really. He had a wife already.”

“Almost unbelievable,” said Harington. “Too damnable.”

Pamela was silent again and then spoke in a low voice.

“I feel as though everything had broken inside me—all the works. Is there such a thing as a broken heart? If so that’s what has happened to me, I suppose. I shall have to pull myself together somehow.”

“It will take time,” said Harington. “Give it time, Pam. That’s the best doctor.”

He wanted to say much more. He wanted to tell her that his love for her hadn’t changed and that he would take care of her and make her forget a tragic episode by his devotion to her. He wanted to take her in his arms there and then, and hold her close to his own heart as a very passionate lover, but he sat quite still and did not frighten her just then.

It was the next evening that he frightened her a little. They were walking in the rose garden after an early supper. Jerningham had turned up and both Harington and Pamela were a little bored with his monologues on the economic situation which he described as ghastly because of rising prices and dwindling markets for British goods.

“Let’s go and hear a nightingale,” suggested Harington in a low voice to Pamela. “It’s better than the voice of the vulture, don’t you think?”

She smiled at him and nodded and presently they slipped through the french windows of the drawing-room on to the terrace and down the steps to the gardens below. The sun was setting and in the Western sky was a lake of gold and crimson, below a flock of rose-tipped feathers.

“Let’s walk down to the lake,” said Harington.

“No, not there,” said Pamela. “I avoid that since poor Robin’s death. I’m afraid of a ghost, Kit.”

“It would be a gentle ghost,” he told her. “Poor old Robin. Henriette drove him to his death, the little slut.”

“Oh, that’s hard,” answered Pamela. “I’ve only pity for her now. We’re all pretty foolish at times. We all want pity. But don’t let’s talk about that. Listen, there’s a nightingale in that holly bush. Hush!”

They heard the first piping call of the male bird followed by a sudden trill of ecstatic notes.

"Magical!" said Harington in a low voice.

They listened but the bird was silent now except for a few little gurgles of liquid sound.

"He knows we're here," said Pam. "He doesn't like an audience. Let's go back, Kit. Mother will be peeved with us."

"Pam," said Harington, "I'm off early tomorrow morning. I want to say something before I go. Do you mind?"

He had frightened her. He saw her startled look.

"Don't say anything foolish, Kit. You have been so kind."

"Nothing foolish," he told her. "It's only this. I'm still your lover. What has happened is wiped out. We're both lonely now, and you're free, thank God. We need each other. I'll take care of you and bring you back to happiness. When are you coming to me, Pam?"

She was silent for a few moments and then gave a little cry.

"Oh, Kit!"

He took hold of her hands and raised them to his lips.

"When will you come to me?" he asked again.

She tried to get her hands free but he held them tight.

"Kit," she cried, "don't frighten me. I'm not ready for you yet. I've only just left Julian. I feel horrible. I want to get clean of all that. I want to wipe all that out of my mind. How can I come to you, my dear, straight from Julian whom I loved? It would be dreadful. Don't you understand?"

"Pam," said Harington in a tremulous voice, "you and I belong to each other. We were destined for each other. Our minds are mated; your Julian was a horrible accident—like an illness. He is just a bad dream. You've wakened up again. You're here in your garden. That bird is singing. We're together in all this beauty. You've come back and I'm waiting for you."

He held her arms in a strong grip and drew her close to him and kissed her lips, until she thrust him back.

"No, Kit," she cried. "Not yet, my dear. Please! Wait for me. Wait till I'm ready. Go on with your work. You've a great adventure ahead. It's more important even than your love."

"No," he said. "It has no importance compared with that. None whatever if we're not together."

"It's for England's sake," she told him. "That's more important than you and me. It's for peace and liberty, Kit."

"I want my own peace first," he said with a kind of anguish.

"Kit," said Pamela, "give me time. Please give me time. You said yourself I needed time as the best physician. One day I'll call for you. One day I'll send an S O S, wherever you are. But I must get free of Julian first. I must wash myself clean of him, if God will let me. Oh, Kit! Oh, my Kit!"

She began to weep and he held her in his arms again.

"I'll wait," he told her. "I'll wait for you, Pam. I've waited before and I'll wait again, however long it may be. And thereto I plight thee my troth, darling Pam, my dearest. So help me God."

"Thanks," she said, "thanks, Kit."

Presently she dried her eyes, and laughed a little and held out her hand to him. Hand in hand they walked back to the terrace, saying nothing more. Then separately they slipped back into the drawing-room where Jerningham was denouncing the inefficiency, the wild extravagance, the monstrous expenditure, ever mounting higher, of the Labour Government in a bankrupt state.

"If they nationalize the steel industry," said Jerningham, "it will be a crime. Coal output under nationalization is going down. Steel output under private enterprise is going up. It's a test case. It's a blinding light."

Lady Bramley spoke to Pamela.

"Where have you been, my dear?"

"Listening to a nightingale, Mother."

"You ought to have been listening to Mr. Jerningham. Most illuminating. I agree with every word he says."

Christopher Harington left Longacre early next morning. He had his work to do.

He had promised Pam to wait until she called him, however long that might be.

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected.

Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

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[The end of *Both Your Houses* by Philip Gibbs]